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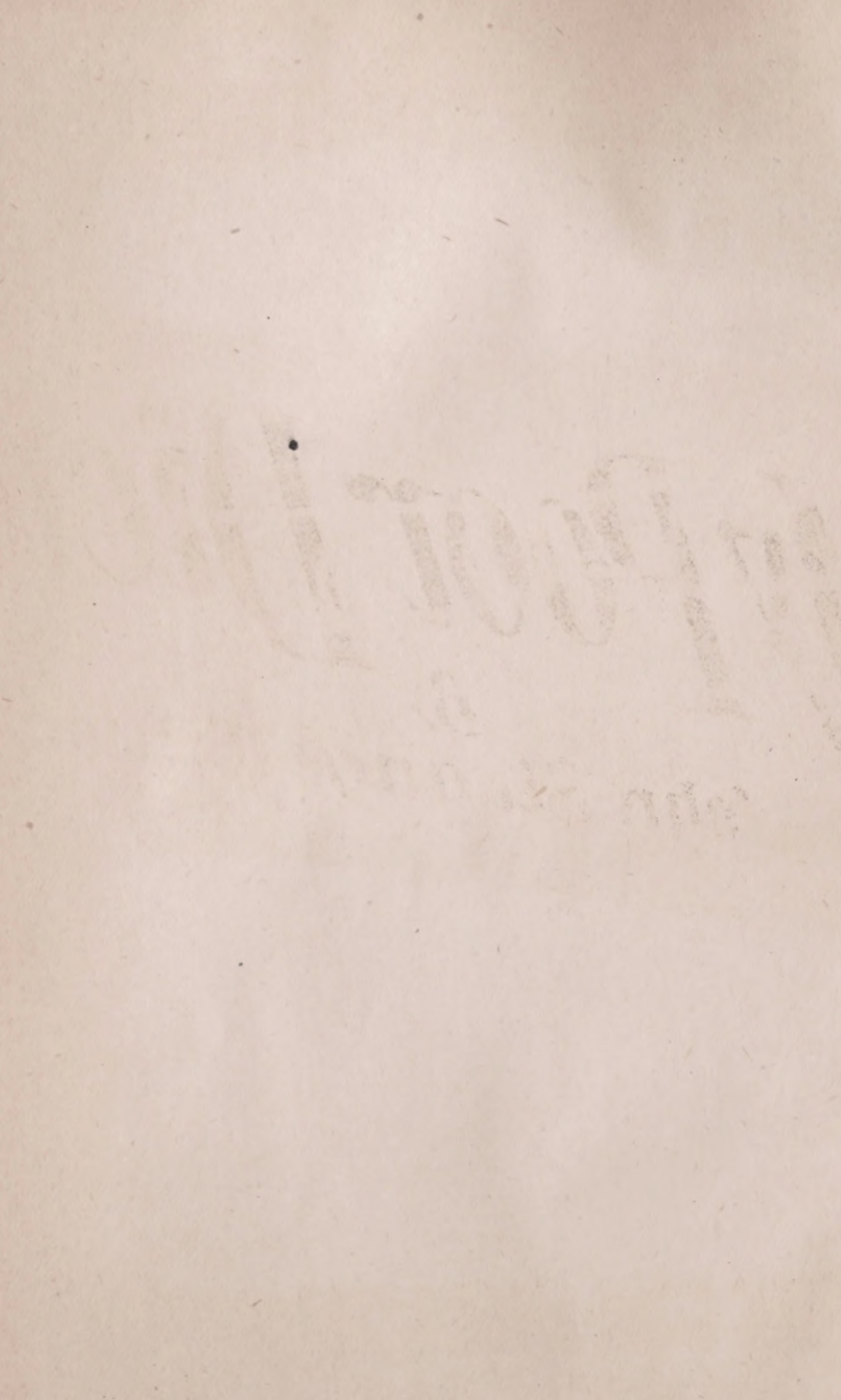
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My Poor Dick

By
John Strange Winter.



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MY POOR DICK.

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

*Hennetta Eliza Vaughan
Standard.*

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MY POOR DICK.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

Love is ever busy with his shuttle,
Is ever weaving into life's dull warp
Bright, gorgeous flowers and scenes Arcadian;
Hanging our gloomy prison-house about
With tapestries, that make its walls dilate
In never-ending vistas of delight.

The Spanish Student.

It was in the evening of a lovely day in June, while the month was yet young, that a tall young man, in the uniform of the Cuirassiers, walked quickly through Trafalgar Square, across the Strand and down Villiers Street on to the Embankment. He was a somewhat remarkable-looking young man, although his uniform was only that of a private. He was well over the average height, very well made and well set-up, and walked with a dash and a shade of a swagger, such as told the ordinary observer that he was not on the worst of terms with himself.

He slackened his pace a little after he got on to the Embankment, which was almost deserted. But presently a slim little figure in a fluttering light gown appeared out of the gathering gloom, from the direction of the city, and Private Richard Trevor went on quickly again.

"Oh, Dick! am I late?" exclaimed the girl, breathlessly.

"Not a bit of it, my sweetheart," answered the soldier,

promptly, then, with equal promptness, took advantage of a tree and the deserted state of the Embankment to put his arm about her, and kiss the pretty, tremulous lips half a dozen times.

“Darling—my darling!” he cried.

She was undoubtedly very pretty. Soft-eyed and delicately tinted, with a slender and graceful figure, and neat little feet, which peeped out now and then from under her light gown. It was but a poor sort of gown, of some light cotton stuff, but it was neatly made and perfectly clean, and the small white hat which shaded her soft dark eyes was pretty and modest looking.

“Oh, Dick,” she cried, “if any one was to see us,” but all the same, she slipped her hand under his arm, and held it very tightly, as they turned and strolled along together.

Dick laughed.

“And if they did, what then? They’d see a fellow kissing his sweetheart, and not ashamed of it either. Why shouldn’t I kiss you, Nell? Surely a chap may kiss his own wife—if not, who may he kiss, I’d like to know?”

“But I’m not your wife yet, Dick,” Nell objected, demurely, holding the arm yet more tightly.

“But you soon will be,” he retorted, confidently.

A bright flush crept up over her pretty face, and a radiant light flooded into her soft eyes.

“Oh, Dick!” she cried, “have you got it?”

Dick looked rather rueful.

“Well, I haven’t,” he said, shaking his head, “but—”

“Oh, Dick!” in deep disappointment.

Dick squared his shoulders, and threw back his handsome head.

“Nell,” he said, in a very soft voice, “after all, why need it make any difference to us? Of course, it’s better to be on the strength—there’s no denying it. But I can’t manage it—there’s so many fellows on the list before me, and I’ve no particular interest to back me up. So why

shouldn't you and I just get married without it, Nell? We sha'n't starve, that's certain."

"But when the regiment goes to India?" Nell faltered.

"We shall do somehow or other," he answered, persuasively. "May be I might get left with the depot for a year, or you could go out as maid to one of the ladies—there's plenty would be willing, ay and glad, to pay your passage for the sake of help on the voyage for themselves or their children. Any way, let's run the risk of that, my sweetheart, and if the very worst was to come to the very worst, why, I should be easier if I had to leave my wife behind than my sweetheart."

"It's a risk," she murmured, hesitatingly.

"A risk, my darling—of course it's a risk, but then everything that's worth having is a risk," he declared. "And, after all, it's worth risking, isn't it?" he asked, squeezing the little hand upon his arm.

"Yes, it is; but—"

"And you don't mind leaving England and going to India *for me*, do you, Nell?" he demanded.

"No, it isn't that," she admitted.

"It isn't as if you had anything to give up here, you know," he urged.

"No, neither father, mother, brother nor sister," she answered; "and no home except with old granny, who's eighty, and isn't my granny at all. No, I've naught to give up, Dick, naught at all. It isn't that; only, it does seem a bit imprudent to marry on nothing, nothing at all. For you know you wouldn't like me to go on at the Coliseum; and, after all, it's only twelve shillings a week I get there, and I'm never likely to get any more."

"Oh, chuck the Coliseum and come along with me, my girl!" Dick Trevor cried, gayly. "If only we can manage to get you out to India, we shall live like fighting-cocks out there on Indian pay. Why, if the worst came to the worst, I'd just up and ask my capt'n to lend it to me, and

I'd dock it off my pay every month until it was paid off. Never fear but we shall rub along somehow; why, we never stuck fast while we've been apart, and we're not likely to stick fast when we're together. And besides, ten to one I get my step before ever we sail."

The girl sighed, a long-drawn sigh which told all too plainly that the prospect of taking such a step was charming to her, but she did not speak, and Dick Trevor rambled gayly on.

"And only think what a good time we shall have together, Nell. Ah! it's jolly good fun going about with a regiment, I can tell you; and there's plenty of real good souls among the married women, who would be only too glad to give you a hand whenever you wanted one—and—and you'd always have *me*, you know, Nell," he wound up softly.

By this time the evening gloom had deepened, and Dick drew his sweetheart down upon a seat, and there they sat, and forgot all except the delicious pleasure of love's young dream. The little stars shone out one by one in the quickly deepening blue of the sky above them. The leaves of the trees rustled over their heads, and the roar of the busy streets rolled behind them, while the shining river ran swiftly and silently at their feet. A night in June of the year; a night in heaven of those two lives!

So it was arranged between them that they should marry without leave or being put on the strength of the regiment to which Dick belonged, and that they should take their chance of Fate turning up trumps or doing exactly the reverse. Had they not youth and strength before them? Dick had only obtained a pass for the night, so that after they had sat for a long time on the seat under the trees, and taken one or two turns to and fro on the Embankment, it was almost time for him to take her home.

It was half past eleven when they found themselves in the Strand again, but that lively thoroughfare was in full

swing, and they had no difficulty in finding a shop in which they could get some modest refreshment of coffee and wholesome sandwiches. And when they had done justice to these, Dick took his sweetheart home to the attic which she shared with the old woman whom she called granny, not because she was that or any other relation to her, but because she had made her home with her for several years past.

“And I’ll write to-morrow,” Dick said, at parting, “and tell you exactly what to do. And then we’ll never be parted any more.”

Nell clung to him in a sudden agony of apprehension.

“Who knows, Dick, perhaps we may?” she cried.

“Well, that’s true. But, if we are husband and wife,” he answered, bravely, “it’ll only be for a little bit, you know. We can always manage to get together again, somehow. Only when one’s not married to a girl, one’s never sure there isn’t some other fellow coming after her, and one’s never sure either that she mayn’t go taking up with him, and clean forgetting all about him as was once everything to her. Don’t you see the difference, my sweetheart?” he wound up.

Nell apparently did see the difference, for just three weeks later than this Private Richard Trevor came up from Colchester, with seven days’ leave before him, and the morning following his arrival in town he and Helen Fielding went to the church of St. Clement Danes, and were made one. The irrevocable step was taken—they had run the risk, and, the plunge once made, Nell—Nell Fielding no longer, but Mrs. Richard Trevor—cast dull care to the four winds of heaven, and set herself, with a fresh, breezy, happy enjoyment, such as made handsome Dick more hopelessly in love with her than ever he had been, to have a real good time before they went down to Colchester to face the stern realities of life together.

For a private soldier in a marching regiment under

orders to sail for India at the end of the year, their honeymoon was perhaps a piece of the most reckless extravagance, and yet it was very modest in reality.

Dick had about eleven pounds put by, and Nell had been able to buy a pretty gray cashmere gown, in which to be married, and a neat little bonnet to match it; and, besides this, she had nearly three pounds to the good, not a small amount, mind you, to be saved out of a treasury of twelve shillings a week, earned in the second row of the ballet at the Coliseum Theater. And what a good time they had, to be sure, a time to be remembered all their after lives, as one of pure and unalloyed pleasure. They wanted for nothing, for they put up at a modest coffee-house, where they could eat a breakfast at a reasonable price, ere they went off for their day's enjoyment.

One day they went up the river by steamer and explored Richmond and Kew, coming back in the cool of the evening, almost too tired to go to see "After Dark" at the Princess, for which a friend had given Nell passes for the pit. On the next they strolled leisurely down the Strand, and along Piccadilly to the park, where they enjoyed two pennyworth of iron chairs with the grandest in the land, and envied nobody as they watched the tide of rank and fashion ebbing and flowing in front of them.

"We had breakfast rather late," Nell said to her husband, when the last of the smart people had disappeared out of the park.

"Well, we had rather," Dick admitted, stretching out his long legs, and thinking how jolly it was to have nothing to do for six whole days but get married and sit on penny chairs in the park, like a lord or a lady of fashion.

"We've got those tickets for the upper boxes of the Coliseum to-night, you know, Dick," Nell went on, "and as they're numbered, we needn't be there a minute before it begins. So if you aren't *very* hungry, need we bother about dinner at all? Couldn't we stop out here, and

watch all the people when they come in again? There's naught I like so well, and I haven't often come, because I'd nobody I ever cared to come with."

"But we can't go all day without something to eat, my bird," Dick objected, with a laugh in his eyes, and a smile on his lips.

"We could have a good meat tea," urged the girl, wistfully, for she did want so badly to stay there under the trees that lovely summer's day.

"Nay, my bird, it's your honey-moon this week," Dick answered, tenderly. "I'm not going to hunger you. We'll stroll out into the street by the gate there," pointing to Albert Gate, "and get something to eat in one of those little shops across the road; and then we will come back, and you shall sit here as long as ever you like."

Ah me! how bright and happy those days were! They seemed to run away so quickly, and yet they were full, even to overflowing, with simple pleasures and gratifications, which afterward made them seem the very longest days that husband and wife had ever lived.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

Whatever road man chooses, Fate
Still holds him subject to her breath.
Spun of all silks, our days and nights
Have sorrows woven with delights;
And of this intermingled shade,
Our various destiny appears,
Even as one sees the course of years
Of summers and of winters made.

To Cardinal Richelieu—from Malherbe.

At the end of the seven days Dick Trevor and Nell went back to Colchester together, and took up the burden of serious life. But they found it great fun; it was no hardship to either of them living in one little room in a part of

the town at which one might reasonably expect a dashing soldier or a young lady in the ballet to sniff scornfully. But Dick had been two years living in a barrack-room; and during the seven years before he 'listed, he had been apprenticed to a blacksmith, who had used him brutally, until he grew bigger and stronger than himself, and as soon as he was free he had "gone for a soldier," and never repented thereof from that day to the one on which this story opens. To him it was delightful to exchange the noise and publicity of a troop-room for what seemed to him a bower shared with her whom he loved more than all the rest of the world put together.

And Nell? Well, one reads of ballet girls who find life a merry enough time; who drive about in luxurious broughams, and live in gilded *maisonnettes* (often enough scarcely in the diminutive); who have diamonds at will, and adorers by the dozen; but Nell had not been one of these, although perhaps only those who know what the training of a ballet girl *in real life* is will be inclined to believe it. There had been neither glamour nor romance about her life, until Dick Trevor, then quartered at Hounslow, had seen her one night at the Coliseum, and had got an acquaintance among the scene-shifters to effect an introduction. For years she had worked early and late, leading the quiet steady respectable life which, believe it or not as you will, is the life of the average ballet girl; and she had made her home in a single room, neither so large nor so airy as the one to which Dick took her in Colchester, and instead of the fine, spruce young soldier whom she had there, her companion had been an old woman of past eighty, who had thought no more of throwing a plate at her head when the fancy took her to do so, than she did of getting drunk every Saturday night that ever came round. So it is credible enough that these two, this bride and groom, were as happy in their little domicile as two turtle-doves, happier indeed, for turtle-doves are quarrelsome

persons on the whole, and enjoy an entirely undeserved reputation for equability of temper and sweetness of disposition. There was not any great display of furniture, but they did not care for that—a neat square of carpet, a cozy old sofa, a table, and three more or less comfortable chairs, a plain iron bedstead, and a little corner wash-stand was all that there was in the room; but it was enough. Nell very soon, with your true Londoner's love of a bit of green, had a couple of pots of musk flowering in the sunny window-sill, and a little gray kitten, which she and Dick had rescued one evening from the cruel hands of a group of rough boys, shared with them the warmth of the sunshine, and tried to catch the flies upon the window-panes.

It was a happy time, and whenever Nell looked round with a satisfied little sigh and said, as she often did, that wherever they were, and whatever they might come to be (meaning, poor girl, when her Dick had successfully climbed the various steps in the ranks, and was entitled to wear the gold lace of an officer), they really could never be happier than they were then, in that their first home, Dick always made reply that it was the first *home* he had ever known since his own father had died, fifteen years before, and his mother had married again almost immediately, when his step-father had promptly pushed him out into the wide world, as he said, to earn his own living, and make a man of him; and almost as invariably he wound up, "Ay, but I shall be able to give you a different home to this when we get out yonder, my bird. No need ever to soil your fingers there."

The same reply always rose to Nell's lips. "But supposing they were not able to manage the passage out," but after suggesting it once or twice, she always bit the words off short, because Dick said they hurt him so, he could not bear even to think of the possibility of their being parted even for a day.

Yet the days went on and still the passage was not secured. The soft summer days grew shorter and slipped into autumn, and autumn grew colder and colder, and gave place to winter; but, though their money was gradually dwindling away, there seemed no prospect of arranging it. One after another Dick's chances of doing so seemed to slip out of his grasp. The officer commanding his troop sent in his papers and left the service, and Dick had not the courage to ask him to lend him the money which would be needed to get his wife a passage to India. He applied to one lady after another who was going out, but each one preferred to have such help as she required from one of the women on the strength, rather than paying the entire passage of Trevor's wife. He tried hard to borrow the money, but nobody was at all inclined to lend it to him on the slender security of a mere promise, and, at last, the very mention of the parting to come (for both of them had begun to realize that there must be a parting), was enough to throw him into such a fever of passionate misery and regret that Nell was positively afraid to tell him what was the truth, that during these few past weeks she had become conscious that there was another life to be thought of besides hers and his.

"It is hard—it is hard!" he cried one night, when not many more days were left to them. "I wish now I'd left you as you was. I'd no right to marry you when I hadn't got put on the strength, and this is sent to punish me for doing it!"

"Nay, don't say that, Dick," she urged, "don't, don't, my dear. I don't wish anything of the sort. It'll only be for a bit, you know. You'll have to save, and save, and save all that *ever* you can. And I shall go back to granny, and we shall soon have enough, never fear; and, who knows, I may hear of a lady wanting a maid or a nurse to go out with her, and I may come out by the very next ship—there's no telling;" but, in spite of her brave

words, Nell Trevor knew only too well that neither the next steamer, nor the next, nor the next after that, would carry her to join her husband in the gorgeous East.

"I can't think what you'll do when I'm gone!" Dick cried in despair.

"Pretty much the same as I did before I ever saw you at all," Nell answered, smoothing his hand between both of hers.

"*Not* in the ballet!" he cried, in horror, a vision of smart young mashers in the stalls, and fascinating troopers in the pit, rising up before him instantly.

"Oh, no! I shouldn't think of going back into the ballet," she answered, smiling to think how safe she was from the temptation of doing so.

"But you must live!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I shall live, never fear," she answered, soothingly. "I know the lines pretty well round about the theaters, and there's always places to be picked up as dressers or wardrobe women, and so on. It isn't as if I'd ever been in trouble when I was on at the Coliseum—I never was late nor nothing."

And this gradually came to be accepted as Nell's future plan of action. She was to go back to the old woman she called granny, and find some place about the Coliseum; and Dick was to save, and save, and save, until between them they had scraped enough together to pay for her passage to India. It was a dreary prospect; but you know when Pandora's box was opened, Hope remained at the bottom, and, in their case, Hope was left to them still.

It was a very tender little plant, it is true, with but two weakly and delicate leaves—a capricious plant, for as they talked about its prospect of life, it sometimes grew and grew like Jonah's gourd, or seemed to shrink and wither until it was hard to realize that it had still any life at all. But in spite of chills and frosts, the little tender flower of Hope was kept alive, and when Dick was the most de-

spondent, Nell was always ready with her brave assurance that it would only be for a little time that they would be parted, and that she surely would be able to find some kind lady about to make the voyage to India, who would be glad of her services in return for her passage. She knew, none better, that she had but small chance of lighting on such a piece of luck, for though she was bonny to look at, had pleasant, modest manners, and a low, sweet voice, she could yet do but few of those things which would be absolute necessities in a traveling-maid. She had never dressed hair on any head except her own; she was no needle-woman, though she could knock up a bit of cheap lace and a bunch of roses into a natty little bonnet, which made half the men who met her think they would like to have a second look at her, and at least a quarter of them want to find out who she was, and where she lived, and where she was going; she had never done anything for a baby or a little child in all her life, and had not the smallest notion how to set about washing and dressing the one, or how to amuse the other. More than once she had watched a friend struggling over the process of making a very young infant's toilet, and how she had pitied the friend. And, worst of all, she knew that if any lady were to ask was she a good sailor, she could not possibly say "Yes." And yet, in spite of all this terrible knowledge which lay hidden in her heart, Nell Trevor kept that little tender flower alive; ay, and contrived somehow to make her Dick think that the sheen upon its leaves was a blossom! Alas! poor girl, it was not so; it was no pretty bloom, but something much nearer to a dew-drop! Women are wonderful creatures—wonderful!

There was no such heroism about Dick. In season and out of season he railed at fate, and, as it were, dashed his head against the wall of his destiny. It was so hard that he had not been born a lord, or at least a sergeant-major, that his Nell might be recognized as something without

which he could not live. If he had only been ten years older, there would have been a chance for her; but he was nothing but a young fool with no more than two years' service and— Well, more than once he caught himself wishing out loud that he and Nell were both quietly dead and out of the road together, where never the pain of parting could come to trouble them again forever.

But there was no use in repining. I heard the other day of a man whose doctor told him that he had an incurable cancer.

“Doctor,” said he, “how long shall I live? Tell me the plain truth.”

“Nine months,” said the doctor—“possibly a year.”

“Very well,” said the sick man, “then I’ll have roast pheasant and champagne every day for my dinner.”

He was a wiser man than my poor Dick; but perhaps he was not married—I do not know. But I do know that he lived for nearly a year, and had a right royal time, in spite of the fell disease which had such a tight hold and deadly grip of him; and I know too that my poor Dick wasted many a one of those last few precious hours in railing and raving at his irrevocable fate—my poor Dick, my poor Dick! And then that last sad morning came, when the gay and gallant regiment, the Cuirassiers, went marching out of Colchester Barracks, in the gray of the winter’s dawn, to the tune of “The Girl I left behind Me.” Nay, what am I saying? It was nothing so lively, nothing so cheery, for the sad strains of “Auld Lang Syne” floated over the quaint old town with the snow-wreaths that drifted, drifted, drifted, like winding-sheets for the graves of more than one broken love-story.

“Cheer up, old chap, never say die!” cried a great hulking dragoon in the corner of Dick’s carriage, as the train moved off. “It ain’t all beer and skittles ’aving yer wife on the strength, I can tell yer.”

“Let the poor chap alone,” growled his neighbor, hav-

ing compassion on poor Dick's wild eyes and heaving chest; "his wife ain't like yours—it don't need 'alf a eye to see that."

"My God, no," muttered Dick, under his breath; but he had no heart to say a single word aloud; his head sunk lower and lower upon his breast, until his Indian helmet hid his face from the sight of all except the man upon his right hand, who did not look at him: and thus he passed the first hour of his life—without Nell.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURDEN OF LONELINESS.

Be of good cheer! for if we love one another,
Nothing in truth can harm us.

Evangeline.

Be still, sad heart, and cease repining,
Behind the clouds the sun is still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dull and dreary.

The Rainy Day.

AFTER the train which took the Royal Regiment of Cuirassiers on the first stage of the way to the shining East had glided out of Colchester Station, Nell Trevor went back alone to the little room in which most of her short married life had been passed, and where she had been so happy.

A strange sense of desolation and loneliness took possession of her, as she shut the door and looked around; the room seemed empty!

So it was! Empty of what had made it home to her, a paradise of contentment and love! Indeed, until that moment, she had never realized that Dick was really gone—that she must take up the burden of loneliness which

would be hers until they should meet again, and face her new life with the best heart she could.

There was still some glow left in the small fire which she had left burning when she went out to see the last of Dick, and Nell threw her coat off, and thrust some bits of wood into the fire, and put a few knobs of coal on the top of it. And then she sat down upon the hearth, where she had sat so often at *his* feet, to think! Poor girl, to think that her Dick was gone—that the pathways of their lives had parted, parted widely now, and God alone knew when they would come together again!

She did not sob or cry, her chest was not heaving as poor Dick's was doing at that moment, but she sat quite still and stared with dry, vacant eyes into the fire, feeling numbed and cold, as if her heart was dead. Poor Nell!

There were still three days left ere her tenancy of the rooms would be at an end, but Nell had intended to go to London that very day. However, when she had sat for nearly an hour on the hearth, she suddenly resolved to remain in Colchester for three days longer.

"It will cost no more, nor indeed as much, to live here as there," she said to herself, "and I shall get a bit used to being alone, to being without Dick, before I go back to the old life again."

In all the girl's after-life, although she had just parted from her Dick, those were three most precious days to her. And when they were at an end, she called in a broker and sold to him the few articles of furniture which had made their home; and then, with her modest box containing her few clothes and such of her household gods as she could carry with her in that way, and with the gray kitten in a basket upon her arm, Nell Trevor turned her back upon the quaint old town, and upon the fresh young romance of her life.

Well, when she found herself in London again, the thick gloom of a winter's afternoon was just settling down over

the town, a dreary drizzle was falling and the pavements, both in roads and foot-ways, were as slippery as if they had been spread with oil. Nell shuddered as the cab turned the corner of the familiar street—for it was all just the same as it had been a year ago, and the very sameness made her feel and realize how different she herself was.

To say that old granny was glad to see her, would be in no way to convey any proper idea of her reception. The old woman was just having a meal of tea, bread and butter, and “creases,” and as Nell opened the door, she looked up, and fixed her bleary eyes upon her, as if she were not quite sure of her identity.

“Granny,” said Nell, stifling a sigh, “don’t you know me?”

“Why, my gal, it’s never yourself!” the old woman exclaimed. “And where’s your man?”

“I’ll tell you all about him presently,” Nell answered. “I suppose you can take me in?”

“Why, yes—”

But Nell did not wait to hear the rest, but turned back, and went down to ask the cabman to bring her box upstairs for her.

The cabman, like all drivers of four-wheelers, objected to leaving his horse standing—said he had been in trouble once for helping a young lady with her box, and he didn’t want no more o’ that. So Nell chartered a young gentleman of nondescript appearance, for a consideration—three-pence, if you are anxious to know the exact sum—to carry her belongings up to old granny’s light and airy apartment.

The old lady had not moved from the table, but she had brought her meal to an end, and, as she leaned back in her chair, she looked up at Nell curiously.

“Where is he then?” she asked.

Nell’s lips quivered.

"The regiment went off to India on Thursday, granny," she said, in a trembling voice.

"To India!" echoed the old woman; "what—without you?"

"Yes, granny," answered Nell, meekly.

"What a pity you ever went and got married to him," remarked granny, speaking out exactly what was in her mind, "because, now he's off to India, why, you might ha' picked up a nice likely young feller any day."

"Granny!" cried poor Nell, indignantly.

"Oh, you might ha' had your bit o' fun first," said the old woman, philosophically.

Nell's eyes filled with tears. She thought of her poor Dick's wild words, his sad eyes, and his heaving chest, his last passionate, miserable farewell. For a moment she struggled to reply—to say something as hot and passionate as she was at that moment; then she remembered that granny was very old, so old that probably she had forgotten her own young days, when she had loved and been loved again.

And then she looked at the old woman in wonder. Had granny ever been young? had she ever loved or been loved again? Possibly—possibly; but Nell felt that it must have been so long, long ago that granny had no remembrance of it whatever.

"Well, it's done, and what's done can't be undone, you know, granny," she said, meekly. "I'm hoping to be going out to India to join Dick before long. We hadn't quite money enough to pay for the passage, or else, of course, I should have gone with them."

"Ah!" muttered the old woman, in a comprehensive tone, as if she understood more than Nell actually said. "Well, all I can say is, it seems a pity to me; but I suppose you know your own know best. Any way, 'ere's a 'ome for you as long as you like to keep it. I've tried others," granny went on, "but somehow we never seemed to hit it like. I'd a gal for a bit as was dresser to Mrs.

Arlington, but she sauced me so orful the first time I was took bad with spasims after she come, that I cleared 'er out next morning, and right glad I was to be quit of her."

Nell smiled, in spite of her misery, at old granny's description. She too had seen granny "took bad with the spasims"—spasims out of a bottle.

"And then I took in another gal, who perfessed to want a quiet, comfortable 'ome. But I had to get rid of 'er too; she wasn't pertic'lar enough what time she come in of a night, or whether she ever come in at all. Twice she got 'erself locked up, so I cleared 'er out too. And after that I thought I'd try being by myself a bit; so there's your bed, and you're welcome to stop in it as long as it suits you."

"Thank you, granny," said Nell, meekly.

And then she looked round at the room, at the bed in question, at old granny herself, with a sick and weary sort of wonder as to how she would ever manage to put in the time which of necessity lay before her. And then she thought of her own spruce, clean, soldierly Dick, her Dick who loved her so, and—shuddered.

CHAPTER IV.

HOPE DEFERRED.

Our feelings and our thoughts
Tend ever on, and rest not in the present,
As drops of rain fall into some dark well,
And from below comes a scarce audible sound,
So fall our thoughts into the dark thereafter,
And their mysterious echo reaches us.

The Spanish Student.

THE following morning Nell went out to see what she could find to do for her living. Naturally she bent her steps first toward the Coliseum Theater; but she found no encouragement there. She was made welcome by every

one who recognized her, but she heard the same story from each—bad business—nothing doing—not a chance of a place about the theater for months to come.

From the Coliseum she went on to several other theaters; but at each and all she heard the same tale—the worst theatrical season that had been known for years; not the smallest chance of a place of any kind for her.

So Nell went home, and counted up her scanty store of money. She had to break into one of her few sovereigns that day, and she laid it on the counter of the shop in which she changed it with a horrible pain at her heart, for she knew that there was a time coming in which she would not be able to work—a time when, so far from adding to her purse, she would have to take from it; and the day of her departure to join her Dick seemed to glide further and further away with every penny she spent.

The following day she went round and tried another batch of theaters, with the same result. Then she went to several registry offices, and put her name down as being willing to render any service in her power in return for a passage to India. Then she went round and tried to get work at several small millinery houses, but without any success; and finally she went home again to old granny, utterly tired out and sick at heart, to find the old woman “took bad with the spasims” again, and the little room reeking with gin.

Poor Nell! She went outside and sat on the draughty stairs until granny got off to bed, and then she crept into her little bed and sobbed herself to sleep, thanking God that there were two beds instead of one, and that her Dick had gone without having the least idea that she would have anything of this kind to bear.

And in the morning granny was far from well! In truth, the old lady, having had a real gay and festive time the previous night, was now feeling what a man about town would call “a bit chippy,” and she remarked plaint-

ively to Nell that the very worst part of the spasims was that they didn't get themselves out of your head for a day or two after the attack was over.

"You don't take enough care of yourself, granny," said Nell.

It was an old formula. In truth, the secret of her being able to get on so well with the old woman, was that she had always kept up the fiction of the "spasims;" for granny was a very sensitive old party, and looked upon a mention, even in the most casual way, of her "spasims" being attributable to gin, as a deliberate and personal insult; or what she, in her own peculiar phraseology, called "sauce."

"May be I don't," she said, in answer to Nell's suggestion about not taking care of herself. "I never was one to think overmuch o' myself. Ay, well, well, I'm very poorly this morning, but I'll be better when I've 'ad a cup o' tea. What—you've got it just brewed. Ay, but you're a good 'un, my gal, and your 'usband ought to be proud o' you. And what luck did you 'ave yesterday, my lass?"

"None at all, granny," said Nell, mournfully.

"None!" echoed the old woman. "What did you try?" she asked.

Nell recounted her doings of the two previous days, and old granny listened with an attentive ear, grunting every now and then, to show that she was taking it all in.

"I'll tell you what I should do if I was you, my gal," she said at last. "I should just go around the market and try the different flower shops; they're allus wanting gals to make up the flowers, and to sell 'em too. I should try 'em, at all events."

"That's good advice, granny," said Nell, eagerly. "I'll go round first thing this morning, and see what I can do. It's a very good idea, granny."

Yet when she reached the market and began to try the different flower shops, granny's idea seemed no more likely to bring her good luck than her own had done, for at

shop after shop the questions and answers were all the same.

“Do you know anything of the business?”

“No!”

“Can you make up flowers?”

“No; but I think I could soon learn.”

“Ah!—well, we can get dozens who think that. I’m afraid we can’t do anything for you just now.”

But at last, when Nell was almost worn out with disappointment, she determined only to try once more, and if the next did not succeed, to give up granny’s idea as being no better than her own. So she entered a shop and waited until its master could speak to her, when she put her question to him in a hopeless tone which positively courted refusal.

The master was, however, blessed with a shade more intelligence than the ordinary run of business people. He took note of the girl’s gentle voice, of her exquisite neatness and cleanliness of person, of her soft eyes and her pure pale cheeks, of her nice well-kept hands, and her modest, quiet aim and manner.

“Married woman?” he asked, his sharp eyes noticing her wedding-ring.

“Yes, sir,” Nell answered. “My husband has just gone out to India—he is in the Cuirassiers.”

“Cuirassiers! H’m!” The florist knew something about the Cuirassiers, and, from a business standpoint, had no great opinion of them. “Husband a private?” he asked.

“Yes,” faltered Nell, with a lump in her throat.

“Ah!—and gone off to India without you—h’m!”

“He couldn’t help it!” Nell cried, eagerly.

“No, no; of course not—they never can,” said the florist, dryly. “Well, so he’s left you to fend for yourself? Ah! that’s a way they have, these soldier chaps.

And you want to go into the flower trade? H'm! Do you know anything about it?"

"Not a thing," said Nell, hopelessly; "but I—I thought I might learn."

"Are you able to give a month to learning your business?"

"A month!" Nell echoed.

Poor girl, it seemed an eternity to her, a whole month.

"Well, if you are a quick sort of girl you might learn all there is to know in a fortnight," the florist answered.

"But, you know, you've got it all to learn as yet, and you can't expect me to start you on full wages and teach you your business at the same time, can you now?"

"Of course not," Nell answered. "I'm not unreasonable, sir; I was only thinking if my money would last as long."

The florist turned and looked at her sharply.

"I'm not a hard man," he said, rather huskily, "and if you're quick, and learn your business soon, I'll put you on to ordinary wages as soon as you can make up a button-hole properly. I can't say fairer than that. And if you get on, may be I'll put you behind the counter, and that'll be a rise for you. But we must see how you get on first—everything'll have to depend on that."

"Oh, sir!" Nell cried, then stopped short, kept silent by a dreadful pain in her throat, which threatened to suffocate her.

The florist went on to speak of one or two other details of business, and then told her the exact sum she would have to begin upon, when he was able to put her on to wages. It was but a very few shillings, a mere pittance, but to Nell Trevor, weary and tired out and very sad at heart, it seemed a great deal. It was a certainty, and there are some situations in life in which a certainty seems an entirely unmixed blessing. It was so to Nell at that time.

And it was wonderful what a change it seemed to have made in her life. She had gone into the shop weary and hopeless and dejected; she came out of it with new strength making her heart beat bravely, with a new light in her eyes, and a smile upon her lips. Already she felt herself so much nearer to Dick!

Then she flew home to granny to tell her the great news, and she flung herself down at the old lady's feet and fairly hugged her.

"Granny!—granny!" she cried, "I'm in luck. I've got a place, and—and—"

Poor Nell, the happy tears came and stopped the rest, and granny had to understand as best she could.

But by and by she was able to talk again, and then she told the old lady everything that had happened.

"It was all through you, granny," she ended.

Granny sniffed and wiped her eyes, and then she put on a virtuous aspect.

"Ah!" she said, drawing herself up, "folk's good deeds allus comes 'ome to 'em. There's never any good comes to gals as sauces pore old ladies because the Almighty chooses to afflict 'em with the spasims—*never!*" and then she added: "*You're* a good gal, Nell, my dear, a good gal—"

CHAPTER V.

BROKEN HOPES.

O great Eternity!

Our little life is but a gust,
That bends the branches of thy tree,
And trails its blossoms in the dust!

Suspiria.

Come back! ye friendships long departed!
That like o'erflowing streamlets started,
And now are dwindled, one by one,
To stony channels in the sun!
Come back! ye friends, whose lives are ended!
Come back, with all that light attended,
Which seemed to darken and decay
When ye arose and went away!

The Golden Legend.

AFTER this Nell settled down to her new life quietly enough, and though at times a fierce yearning for her Dick took possession of her, until she felt as if she could not go on living without him, yet she never thought of adding to his troubles by letting him know of hers.

As a matter of fact she did not write to him at all until she had had a letter from him. That she had after the regiment had touched at Port Said, a letter filled, from beginning to end, with passionate wild regret, an outpouring against fate, unalterable fate.

Nell wrote to him after she had this, a long, cheerful, tender letter, telling him that she had got work already, work which she thought she should like very much, and which after a short time would, she believed, prove very remunerative, and help her nicely to make up the sum which would be necessary to pay for her passage out to India.

At this point she stopped short, and hesitated whether to

go on further—whether to tell him of the change which was coming—of that other little life that would be the link which would serve to bind their hearts yet more closely together even than they already were.

“Must I tell him?” she asked herself, and then she remembered that Dick’s letter had been full of passionate misery, and that this would seem to him the crowning misfortune of his life. “I had better wait a week or two before I say anything. He will get used to being without me by and by!” she said. So her letter went off, and she kept her secret still.

From Bombay she had a second letter, more full of misery, more despairing, more utterly unhappy than the first had been.

“I’m so miserable without my darling,” Dick wrote, “that I feel more like deserting than going on up country. India’s a beastly hole, and if it wasn’t for my little Nell at home I believe I should have dropped quietly overboard and put an end to it ever so long since.”

“It’s well I said nothing,” said Nell to herself, with a sigh.

But she kissed the flimsy sheet ere she replaced it in its envelope. With all her sorrow and her yearning for Dick, it was very sweet to her to find that he was wretched without her. Nell was a true woman. She did not want her Dick to be wretched—on the contrary, indeed there were few sacrifices which she would not cheerfully have made to have secured peace and happiness for him—yet, since he was wretched, and wretched because he was parted from her, Nell felt a solid satisfaction that it was so.

So a week or two went by. She picked up the tricks of the flower trade with amazing rapidity, and the fingers which had been so deft at tossing a few artificial flowers and a bow or two of ribbon together and making a smart little bonnet of them, now became even more skilled at making the largest possible show out of the fewest flowers

and sprays of fern. To the florist who had proved her good angel she had turned out a good speculation, and long before the season began he had taken her from among the flower-mounters, and had given her a place behind the counter of the shop.

"I think I must tell my poor boy everything now," Nell said to herself, when she went home for the first time with her larger wages in her hand. "I'll just wait till I hear from him again, and then I'll send him a real long letter; he'll be ever so much happier when he knows how well I'm getting on."

But poor Dick was fated not to have any such letter from the wife he had left behind him. A week later Nell had a letter from him which was no more resigned to his fate than those which had gone before, and before she could answer, a rumor crept out that there was serious trouble on the Afghan frontier, and that most of the troops in India were already on their way thither, the Royal Regiment of Cuirassiers among them.

And oh! what anxious weeks those were which followed. Every day there were fresh rumors from the East, almost every day fresh reports of disaster. And then at last there came an awful day, when the boys hawking papers in the streets made all London ring with an announcement that made Nell's very blood run cold.

"Terrible disaster in Af—ghan—is—tan! A whole British regiment swept away by the floods!"

This, when boiled down to the literal truth, proved to be a less extensive though still very terrible accident, for, owing to the swollen state of the Caubool River, a party of Cuirassiers had attempted to cross it at a wrong place, mistaking the ford, and some fifty men and horses had been drowned.

At the foot of the telegram were some of the names of the men who had been lost, and among them was that of Private R. Trevor, A Troop.

How shall I attempt to describe the effect of this news upon poor Nell? She was bewildered, stunned, frozen by the awful blow which had fallen upon her. She had neither sobbed nor cried at parting from Dick, and she did not sob or cry now that she knew that she would never see him again. She was very quiet, and as composed, nay, more composed, than she would have been if she had heard that he had just got his promotion.

Yes, she was perfectly composed, for she put on her bonnet and cloak, and went down to the Horse Guards to see if she could find out anything more definite about her Dick's fate.

And there she saw a very kind and courteous gentleman, who saw the overwhelming pain in the girl's soft eyes, saw too that the blow had fallen more heavily upon her than it might have done under different circumstances, saw and was full of pity for her.

"Was Private Trevor your husband?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Nell answered.

"And you were not on the strength?"

"No, sir; he tried hard for it, but he was young and—and he couldn't manage it."

"Ah! Well, my poor girl, I am afraid I can give you no comfort. I'm afraid there is no hope."

She mistook the kindness for uncertainty, and lifted her eyes, with a new ray of hope shining in them, eagerly to his.

"You think there may be a mistake, sir?" she asked, breathlessly—"that there might be a mistake in the name?"

The gentleman shook his head sadly.

"My poor girl, I am very, very sorry for you. I have a son out there, and I know what it is; but it is no use my telling a lie, and saying I think there may be a mistake, for the sake of buoying you up with false hopes. It would

be a lie, for I am sure, only too sure, that there is no mistake. It is too true, too true."

Nell turned to go away.

"You have been very kind to me, sir," she said, quietly. "I shall never forget it. I can't say what I want to properly, for I'm dazed and hardly know what I'm doing. But he was all I had in the world—in the world," and then she turned and went out into the world alone.

CHAPTER VI.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

The conflict of the Present and the Past,
The ideal and the actual in our life,
As on a field of battle held me fast,
While this world and the next world were at strife.

Monte Cassino.

LESS than a month after this old granny was taken ill, very ill. For three days she lay gasping for breath, kept alive only by frequent sips of her favorite remedy for "the spasims."

"Yes, let the poor old soul have it," said the good-natured young doctor, who was called in to attend her, in answer to a question put to him by Nell. "Oh, yes! It will be a comfort to her, and it won't make any difference to the end."

So Nell went on feeding old granny, and listening to her rambling talk. And on the evening of the third day there was a change, a time when granny looked up at her with clear and sensible recognition in her faded eyes.

"I've got to the far end now, my gal," she said, in her feeble and faltering tones. "I'm glad you're 'ere yet. You've stuck to me well, my gal, in spite of your own trouble—poor lass—poor lass! But it won't be for long, and you'll stay by me to the last now, won't you?"

"Yes, granny, that I will," said Nell, holding her hand fast.

"It won't be for long, and see, my gal, there's one or two things I want you to do for me. Fetch me that box off the little table by the fire. Ay, that's it. Now open it for me. Ay, so. See, there's ten pounds in this little parcel. I want you to take 'old of my 'and and swear by God Almighty you'll see me buried proper."

"I swear I'll see you buried properly, granny," said Nell, with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

The old woman scanned the girl's face with a long and searching look.

"I believe you, Nell; you're a good gal, a good gal. You never sauced me when I was took bad, and it'll all come 'ome to you, my gal, it'll come 'ome to you."

"Is that all you wanted to tell me, granny?" Nell asked, fearing that the gleam of consciousness would soon be gone.

"No, no," granny cried, nervously. "Give me a box out of the big box, a littleish flat box—ay, that's it."

Nell took out of the old work-box a small flat parcel, carefully tied with string and sealed in at least a dozen places. Old granny took it with her skinny, trembling hand.

"Take it," she said, "and keep it until I'm gone, until I'm put out o' the way proper and everything, and then you can open it; and remember it's from me for yourself—from the poor old woman that you was kind and good to when you was in trouble yourself."

"Very well, granny; I'll do what you say," Nell answered.

"You will?" eagerly.

"Oh, yes, granny; you know I will!" Nell cried, distressed that the poor old soul should doubt her even for a moment.

"Ah! you're a good sort," said the old woman, in a

satisfied tone; and then she lay quietly back and seemed to doze awhile. And Nell sat on still as a mouse beside her, holding her hand tightly, and thus the long hours crept away.

Day faded into dusk, and dusk into evening, but Nell sat there still, neither stirring nor speaking, lest she should disturb the dying. For dying old granny was even then.

Poor old granny, in the quiet watches of that long night, she murmured something about "Good gal—in trouble—keep your promise." And then she groped about on the bed as if seeking for something, and smiled a little when Nell took her hand; and presently, just as the first red flush of the dawn was stealing across the sky, something told Nell that this was the very end; for it was neither a movement nor a sigh, only a sudden hush!

They were not quite alone; for a neighbor, knowing how ill old granny was, had, with that helpful kindness which the poor so often show to one another, come in and offered to stay till the end.

Nell had accepted the offer with gratitude, but knowing that she was a hard-working woman who could ill spare a night's sleep, had said to her:

"Thank you kindly, Mrs. Simmons, but if you stop in the room with me, that's all I need. Lie down on my bed, and if any change comes, I'll call you."

So Mrs. Simmons lay down, and in less than five minutes was sound asleep, and Nell sat on beside the bed watching and waiting; and in the end the change came so suddenly, that before she could arouse the sleeping woman poor old granny, worn out by eighty years of a hard London life, had entered upon her rest.

Poor old granny! With all her little weaknesses Nell missed her sorely, and it was with a heavy, heavy heart that she helped the good neighbor, who had come to her in her hour of need, to perform those last sad offices which we shall all want in turn one day. And when all was over,

she gathered her few possessions together and went with them to the friendly shelter of Mrs. Simmons's room on the next floor lower down the house.

"Mrs. Trevor, my dear," said that good soul, after Nell had tidied herself and had had a rest, "you can't go back to yon room when they've took the poor old lady away."

"No, Mrs. Simmons, I don't think I can," said Nell, sadly.

"Well, my dear," said the older woman, "I can't say to you come and make your 'ome with me, though I would if I could, Gord knows. But if it will suit you or convenience you in any way to stop 'ere for the next month or so, why just stop, and you'll be 'eartily welcome. I can't say no more."

"Mrs. Simmons," returned Nell, gratefully, "you're very kind and good, and I'll take you at your word, and thank you kindly with all my heart. I'm alone and in trouble all round, and I dread to look forward as much as I do to look back; but I'm not destitute—I'm not in want, and if I can stop here till I have time to get myself into a decent room, it will be a great service to me."

So they arranged it between them, that for the next month or so Nell should look upon Mrs. Simmons's room as her home. By that time Nell thought she could find a home with some decent, tidy woman who found her employment within doors, with whom she would be able to leave her baby during her own working-hours.

"And if you take my advice," said Mrs. Simmons, when they were talking her plans over on the evening of the day when old granny had been laid quietly away to her long rest, "you will just get yourself took in at one of the 'orspitals when your time comes. My last little 'un was born in Queen Charlotte's, and if I'd been a princess born and bred, I couldn't have been better took care of. You go into one o' the 'orspitals, my dear, and you'll start yourself with a better chance."

Nell looked at Mrs. Simmons with her big soft eyes, as if her suggestion was a good one and welcome.

"Yes, I think you're right, Mrs. Simmons," she said, slowly, "I think you're right."

Well, it was nearly a week later than this that Nell needed to get something out of her neat little wooden desk, which was almost all that she had—beside her wedding-ring and a photograph—to remind her of her poor Dick. And while turning over the contents thereof, she all at once came upon the little flat box which old granny had put into her hands but a few hours before she died.

"Why, here's poor old granny's last present to me," she said to herself; "poor old soul, I wonder what it is. She was so very particular about my not opening it till she was taken quite out of the way; and I never gave it another thought until this minute."

It was a small flat box, carefully tied with string and sealed in at least a dozen places, and on the cover was written—not in granny's hand, for Nell knew that she could neither read nor write, but in a fairly legible hand: "Mrs. Richard Trevor. To be given to her after my death."

"Poor old granny," she murmured; "it is something she set great store by. She knew I would take care of it for her—poor old granny!"

She cut the string and broke the seals, and when she had unfastened the paper, she found but a small card-board box, such as are used for three cakes of scented soap. And when she lifted the lid, there still seemed nothing of much value—a little cambric handkerchief, a scrap or two of yellowish lace, and—and—why, what were these? Crisp, new, crackling Bank of England notes—ten—twenty—thirty—fifty—a hundred—no, ninety-five pounds!

For a moment Nell was stupefied with surprise; then a wild joy shot through her heart at the thought that she need save and screw no longer, for here was the money for her passage to India, ay, and more than her passage!

But oh! memory — memory! The girl's joy died in its birth, for she remembered that it was all dross to her now, for she would never go out to the shining East, because there was no Dick watching and waiting for her now — only another Dick, not her Dick at all it seemed to her, awaiting her in a country still further away, to which no money could pay the passage and no earthly ship would ever set her sails.

CHAPTER VII.

ATCHAFALAYA.

Like a bell with solemn, sweet vibrations,
I hear once more the voice of Christ say, "Peace,"
Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals
The blast of war's great organ shakes the skies!

The Arsenal at Springfield.

IF Nell had but known it, old granny's hard earnings and harder savings had come to her for the very purpose of paying her passage to India so soon as she should be over her trouble and able to travel! But Nell did not know it, and mourned for her poor Dick as one dead.

Yet Dick was not dead at all! He was alive and well at the very moment when his wife was sitting with her newly discovered legacy in her lap, feeling all the bitterness of its having come to her too late! He was neither lying at the bottom of the Caubool River nor yet among the fragrant roses and jasmine-trees of the burial-ground at Jellalabad, where a rough device marks out in white stones the place where rest in their last sleep those with whom he was reported to have lost his life.

As it happened, he had not even been of the party which had met with the disaster; but his name had been given in the report of the affair in mistake for that of one Philip Reevor, a fine young fellow who had been his good friend for many a day. And, as a matter of fact, my poor Dick,

not being in the way of seeing English newspapers, did not know that any such mistake had been made. He shed a few honest tears over his friend's grave and missed him horribly, perhaps more than any one could have missed him whose heart was not aching for his dearest left behind to battle with a hard and cruel world as best she could. He wrote home to Nell, and told her all the sad tale; but, alas! when the letter got to the house where poor old granny had died, his Nell was lying in a Maternity Hospital, with a baby at her breast; and as good Mrs. Simmons, having had a flare-up with the landlady and taken herself off to other quarters, was not there to say what should be done with the missive, it was given back to the postman and in due course came back to its writer, marked "Gone away. Left no address."

For a moment poor Dick's heart seemed fairly to stand still! What did it mean? "Gone away. Left no address!" At least a dozen suggestions arose in his mind. Could Nell—his Nell—have been persuaded that—but no, no, that was absurd, preposterous! He would not sully her by letting such an unholy thought dwell in his mind for a moment. No, no; either she had found the old woman impossible to live with, after being so happy in their bright little home at Colchester, or else they had had a row with the landlady, and had changed their quarters; or—and how his heart danced with joy at the thought of it—perhaps she had had the chance of a passage out, and was already on her way to join him—perhaps she wanted to surprise him by writing to him from Bombay, or from some station even yet nearer to the Afghan frontier.

So my poor Dick plucked up heart o' grace once more, and set himself patiently to await tidings of the girl he had left behind him! It was but dreary work; for that part of the shining East which is called Afghanistan is not altogether the best climate in the world for the cultivation of the patient virtues; and as week after week dragged its

slow course along, so my poor Dick's heart sunk lower and lower, until at last he began to feel as if it would make but little difference to him whether he got safely back into India again, or whether he left his bones to bleach upon an Afghan battle-field.

Yet when an Afghan bullet ripped up his arm from the elbow to the shoulder, and played havoc with muscles and bone such as he would never cease to feel the effects of as long as he might live, the instinct of self-preservation came to his aid, and he fought for his life as only a man of his age ever can fight, and eventually he found himself sent off with a batch of men to a sanatorium in the hills, yet with but little prospect before him of ever having the full use of his left arm again. He was kept at the hill station for some months, ere he was considered in a fit state to make the journey home, although he was, by the time he had crossed the Afghan frontier, feverishly anxious to see his native country once more. During all this time he had never heard one word from his Nell, his wife. Of course, that was not surprising, when it is remembered that Nell believed that he had given up his life in the Caubool River months and months before, but, you see, Dick knew nothing about that, and so he watched and waited in vain.

And at last a medical board sat upon him, and he was pronounced well enough to make the homeward journey. Happy, happy day! Surely never did miserable captive come out of Millbank Prison with heart so joyous and hope so high as were Dick Trevor's heart and hope when he turned his back upon the shining East, the shining East where he and Nell were to be so happy and prosperous together, the land where life was to be all cakes and ale.

And as he accomplished the different stages of his journey, heart and hope both grew lighter, until by the time that the English coast came in sight, you might have believed that his Nell would be waiting on the quay at Southampton to receive him.

That, alas! was not so. He scanned the faces of the crowd collected with eager eyes, but hers was not among them. And then he was carried off to Netley, which he afterward described as a ghastly sepulcher, and finally was told, with more or less circumlocution, that as he was no longer of any use as a soldier, his valuable services could be dispensed with.

True, there was a small amount *per diem* as a solace for the loss of his health and strength, but, in his anxiety to find some news or other of his wife, Dick scarcely gave it a thought! So at last he was free—free as air to go to London town and search, and search, and search for her whom he loved more than all the world beside. And that was just what Dick did the very day that he was able to walk out of Netley Hospital and go whither he would. He took the first train to town, and when he found himself in the old familiar streets, hope began to rise again, and he felt that he was nearer to Nell, and was almost happy.

He did not lose an hour, but went straight to the house in the neighborhood of Covent Garden, where his sweetheart had used to live with the old woman whom she called granny, and from which his last letter to her had been returned marked “Gone away. Left no address.”

But he found no news of her there. An elderly and somewhat untidy lady of a vinegarish aspect came in answer to his inquiry, and answered his questions in a suspicious manner, as if he was offering her a personal affront by putting them.

“Young woman—’ere?—Mrs. Trevor? No—I don’t know no Mrs. Tevor. Lived with an old lady she used to call granny? No; there ain’t no old ladies ’ere. I only takes in gentlemen lodgers—can’t do with ladies, that I can’t—they ain’t reg’lar enough in their ’abits for me, ain’t ladies. No; I’m afraid I can’t ’elp you, young man. What? you want to know ’ow long I’ve ’ad the ’ouse? Well, I never! Oh! you didn’t mean no offense. Well,

I'm glad to 'ear *that*. H'm; and you want to know 'ow long I've 'ad the 'ouse?' "

"Look here, missis," said poor Dick, desperately, "I went out to India a little over two years ago, and left my wife here, living with her old granny in this house. I never had but one letter from her after we went on active service, and I'm just mad for news of her. If you can help me to it, for God's sake do, but don't tantalize me. If there is aught you know, in Heaven's name, tell me!"

The sour-faced lady was evidently startled.

"Oh! I don't know nothing that can 'elp you, I'm sure," she said, tartly. "I've been 'ere trying to make both ends meet for fifteen months past, and doing it very badly, and I don't know nothing about no young ladies nor old ladies either, not nothing."

"She never came back to see if there were any letters or aught for her?" asked my poor Dick, feeling hope slipping away from him all at once, and growing very sick and faint.

"Never came back at all in my time," snapped the sour-faced lady, sharply.

"Ah!" came from between Dick's lips, with a sort of gasp. He leaned against the door-post with a feeling that if the good woman at his elbow said another word, he should give way all at once and collapse into a sobbing, shuddering heap upon the pavement.

And the sour-faced lady did go on. Dick knew it not, but among her friends and acquaintances she was considered rather remarkable for the length of her tongue.

"I'm sure, young man, you do look bad, that's certain: seems to me as if you might be took off sudden any time. And as for any young woman, why, as I tell you, I 'aven't seen none hereabouts, and if I was you, I should just make up my mind to forget her, and 'ave done with it. There's plenty o' young women about, sadly too many; a set o' trolloping hussies as—"

My poor Dick waited to hear no more. With a cry, or what was almost a cry, he broke away and fairly fled from the sound of the sour, tart voice. For an hour he wandered up and down the Embankment, where he and she had told their love under the trees and the gas-lamps, before he could bring himself to follow his search further. To think that Nell, his Nell, should be classed by an old hag like that with a set of trolloping hussies! It was too cruel, too cruel!

But at last he came round to a more reasonable way of looking at the matter. Of course, the sour-faced lady had never seen his Nell. She did not, and could not be expected to know what an angel she was—how smart and neat, how modest and prim and good her every thought and action—how sweet and gentle her every tone and gesture. How should she know that there was not his Nell's equal in all the world? How should she know anything about her? Why, he was an utter fool, he told himself, to be angry about it even for a moment.

And then he began to think that since he had been ill and unhappy he was no such great things to look at, and how, likely enough, the good lady had judged of his Nell by his looks; and by the time Dick's arguments had reached this point, he had also come to the conclusion that the very best thing he could do would be to look out an abiding-place for himself, get something to eat, and then simply go on searching for Nell until he found her.

To find himself a bed for the night was not a difficult task; in fact, he went straight to the coffee-house where Nell and he had stayed during their brief and happy honey-moon, and after he had had a meal, he went back again to the street where his Nell and granny had lived. Not to try the house again—no, he had got all the information out of the sour-faced lady that she was able to give. No; but he thought, by judicious inquiry at one or two shops in the street, he might learn something, and, of

course, anything was better than nothing. The first shop he tried was a provision store! No; they knew nothing at all—had not, in fact, been in possession more than six months. The next was a dairy, where they knew just about as much as they had done at the provision store.

In succession he tried a grocer's, a butcher's, and a cook-shop; and all to no purpose. And then it occurred to him that he was horribly tired, that he was thoroughly overtaxing his small amount of strength, and that he had far better go and get a good night's rest, and set to work again in the morning, than completely knock himself up, as he was in a fair way of doing now.

He thought he would like a smoke, a cigarette—for, in his weak state, Dick was afraid to indulge except in the very mildest form of smoking—and to obtain it, went into almost the only shop in the street he had not already entered.

A pleasant-spoken woman of middle age was behind the counter, and asked his request for a box of cigarettes with pleasant voice and smile; Dick opened the box and took a cigarette out of it.

“Oh! give me a box of lights, will you?” he said, and laid a florin down on the corner in payment.

The mistress of the shop handed back his change, and Dick lighted his cigarette, bade her good-night, and was about to go out again, when a thought presented itself to his mind which made him turn back again.

“I say, missis,” he said, eagerly, “might I ask you a question?”

“Of course—to be sure,” she answered, civilly.

“Well, did you ever know anything of a young woman called Trevor—Mrs. Trevor? She lived over there at No. 30, with an old lady she used to call her granny, though, as a matter of fact, there was no relationship between 'em?”

“At No. 30?” repeated the woman. “Why, that's Mrs. Simpson's. She lets off nearly all the rooms.”

"I don't know. I went there to ask to-day, and the good lady nearly snapped my head off," Dick answered.

"Ay, she is rather sharp-spoken," said the woman, with a laugh, "but there's more bark than bite about her. I've known her be very kind, more than once. However, you wanted to know something of a Mrs. Trevor—Mrs. Trevor. I can't recall the name just now. Mrs. Trevor! Had she a husband?"

"Yes, she had a husband," poor Dick answered, sadly—"but he wasn't here with her."

The inexpressible sadness of his tone caused the good soul to look up at him.

"You wasn't her husband, were you?" she asked.

"Yes, I was," he answered—"I am."

"And how is it you don't know where she is?" she asked.

Thus encouraged, Dick told his story—how he and Nell had married without leave, and hoping they would be able to manage the passage to India somehow or other—how they had parted—how the regiment had been sent on active service, and how his last letter addressed to No. 30, had been returned to him marked "Gone away. Left no address."

"And that," Dick wound up, "was the very last that ever I heard of her."

"And you think she was the sort of girl who'd be likely to stick to you?" his new friend asked.

"I'd stake my life, ay, and my soul for that matter, upon it!" Dick asserted, fiercely.

"I see—I see." The good woman was more than doubtful about it herself. "But about the old lady at No. 30. I shouldn't at all wonder if you meant old Mrs. Fergus—"

"That's her!" cried Dick, suddenly remembering hearing once from his darling that old granny's name was Fergus—"yes, that's her."

“Ah! poor old lady, she’s dead—she must have been dead nearly two years. Yes, I knew her, but I never heard aught of any Mrs. Trevor living with her. There was a girl or two came and stayed a bit, but they didn’t get on very well together; and then Nell Fielding came back, and she was there when the poor old lady died. It wouldn’t be any of them—scarce likely—and, as I say, Nell Fielding came back again—she was in the chorus at the Coliseum—a nice girl— Why—” But poor Dick’s strength had given way all at once, and he reeled back to a chair, where he sat down in a dead faint.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW IDEA.

O friend! O best of friends! Thy absence more
Than the impending night darkens the landscape o’er.

The Golden Legend.

Thy dress was like the lilies,
And thy heart as pure as they.

A Gleam of Sunshine.

WHEN my poor Dick suddenly sat down upon a chair and fainted dead away, the good lady to whom the tobacco shop belonged—Mrs. Jones by name—ran to the door which led into the house, and called sharply: “Celia! Celia!” then ran to Dick, and lifted his head on to her shoulder.

In answer to her cry Celia, a smart, fresh-colored, buxom girl, came running out of the house.

“Why, what is it, mother? Oh! poor fellow, is he ill?”

“Yes—bring some brandy and some water at once,” cried Mrs. Jones, fearing lest he might slip out of this world into the next, if she were not quick with restoratives.

So Celia ran away into the house again, and came quickly back with some brandy in a glass, and a jug of water.

It was very little of the last that the good woman added to the spirit in the glass, and she held my poor Dick's head up, and forced some of the mixture down his throat. It was strong, and perhaps not very good, but it had the desired effect, and caused him to shiver and then to open his eyes. He started a little as he saw the strange faces bending over him, then he struggled to sit up.

"Why—have I—what's the matter?" he asked, in a bewildered sort of way.

"You've been a bit ill," said Mrs. Jones, kindly, "but it's all right now. Keep yourself quiet, and you'll be better presently."

By this time several customers had come into the shop, and were pressing round, as men and women in London always do, to see what was the matter.

"It's nothing, gentlemen," said Mrs. Jones, rather tartly—"only a gentleman took a bit faint. Celia, take the gentleman into the parlor, and I'll come to him in a minute or two, and tell him what he wants to know. Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

Thus bidden by the mother, encouraged by the bright-faced daughter, and feeling in himself as if all creation were swimming round him, Dick got up from the chair and went unsteadily into the parlor. It was a neat and cheerful little place, with a broad-seated old sofa covered with a gay woolen rug, a bright red hearth-rug, and an old-fashioned brass fender which shone like gold.

"Sit down here, sir," said Celia Jones, with a hospitable gesture toward the sofa.

"You're very kind to me, miss," said Dick, gratefully. "I'm sure I ought to be ashamed of coming into a lady's house and making such a fool of myself,"—but, all the same, he was glad to sit down in the place to which she had pointed, though, when he was planted there, he could hardly find patience enough to wait quietly until Mrs. Jones should come back to tell him about his darling.

It was not really very long that he had to wait, though it seemed so; indeed, it seemed like an eternity before the comely widow came in out of the shop and said to her daughter—

“You go and take my place for a minute or two, Celia. This gentleman is in trouble, and perhaps we may be able to help him.”

Celia rose obediently and went into the shop, closing the door behind her, and then my poor Dick turned round to his new friend, with an eager and anxious face.

“Well?” he asked, impatiently, and with all his heart shining out of his hollow eyes.

Mrs. Jones looked, as she felt, puzzled.

“I’m very much afraid that I don’t *know* anything, but I know people who know the house, and I could inquire—”

“But Nell Fielding—my Nell—that’s her I’m in search of!” Dick panted.

“Lor’! you don’t say so,” ejaculated Mrs. Jones, with a scared look. “And was she *your wife*?”

“Yes; she is my wife,” answered my poor Dick, clinging resolutely to the idea that his Nell was his Nell still.

“Your wife! And—and—why! I never knew that she was married!” Mrs. Jones exclaimed. “I wonder how it was that old Mrs. Fergus never mentioned it to me. For she used to come here for snuff regular, and she told me, one time or another, all the troubles she had, and a great trouble she made of Nell Fielding’s leaving her, I can tell you. And then when she came back again, she came and told me the very next day, but it’s queer she should never tell me that Nell had got married.”

“She was married right enough,” Dick answered. “We were foolish marrying without a penny, but God knows we were honest, and we were married close by here, and she stayed with me till I had to go to India with my regiment, for get her out with us I couldn’t, though I tried every way that I knew to do it. But don’t keep me in suspense,

missis; if you know where she is, or aught about her, let me hear it at once."

"My poor fellow!" answered Mrs. Jones, with infinite pity shining in her kind eyes, "I have never set eyes on her since near about the time that the old woman died. I never knew her as I did old Mrs. Fergus, for she but seldom came here for anything for her. But—but—tell me, was there any prospect of—of a family when you went to India?"

My poor Dick's face grew ashen white at the very thought of such a thing.

"Do you mean a baby, missis?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Why, yes, of course. What else should I mean?" she returned.

Dick stared at her for a minute in perplexity.

"What have you in your mind, missis?" he demanded.

"There was naught of the sort that I know of. Nell never let on to me if it was so."

Mrs. Jones shook her head.

"But I have my suspicions that it was so," she answered; "though, mind, the old woman never hinted at it to me, and I only saw Nell once or twice after she came back again before I lost sight of her."

"And it's too late to-night to try and find out anything more about her," said my poor Dick, in a very wistful tone.

"I am afraid it is," answered Mrs. Jones, kindly; "but there, Mr. Trevor, don't take on and worry yourself about her yet. Go home and try to get a good night's rest, and come back to me to-morrow evening—not before, for the morning is always a slack time with us, and I'll just take a walk round and see if I can't make something out for you."

"Missis," cried my poor Dick, dashing his hand across his eyes, "you're the best friend that ever I had in my life, and Him above us will bless you for it."

“Well, I hope I’m able to do any one a good turn when I can,” said she, pleasantly.

After that Dick got himself away with a few more grateful words and a great many blushes; and as he passed through the little shop, he made Miss Celia a stiff military salute, which caused her to blush up to her very eyes, and remark to her mother that her new acquaintance seemed an uncommonly pleasant fellow.

“A real good fellow, Celia,” said Mrs. Jones, without hesitation, “but married, and in trouble. Ah, well, my girl, I hope trouble of that sort will never come nigh hand of you.”

Meantime Dick had passed out into the busy street, and as he turned from the door-way he glanced up at the name above it. “Marian Jones,” etc., was the inscription just below the fan-light, and Dick stopped still a moment.

“Ah, Marian Jones—Marian Jones, it’s a good woman’s heart that beats in your bosom. I’ll do something for you some day,” he murmured, “see if I don’t—see if I don’t.”

“Come, come, young feller,” said a policeman, sharply, at his elbow, “you mustn’t use threatening language about here. I’ll have to move you on, if you don’t take care.”

My poor Dick looked at him with an amused wonder.

“I ain’t drunk, mister,” he said, contemptuously—“and as for threatening language, why, I’ve heard none but yours. You’d better go in and ask the lady if I’ve been annoying her in any way—that’s what *you’d* best do.”

He turned on his heel and went along the street with something of his old army swing; and after watching him with more than a suspicion that he was the worse for drink, the blue-coated limb of the law turned into the tobacconist’s little shop.

“I say, missis,” he began, “you’ve had a tall, military-looking chap in ’ere to-night.”

“I had, policeman, and what of it?” asked the widow, sharply.

“Was ’e a-saying or a-doing aught to annoy you?” he demanded.

“No, policeman, he wasn’t,” returned Mrs. Jones, very tartly. “Very good of you, I’m sure, to look in if you had your doubts, but, all the same, when I want help from any of you gentlemen I’m quite the woman to ask for it, but until I do ask for it, I can do without it, thank you. Good-evening to you.”

As the policeman went out, rather abashed by this reception, Mrs. Jones turned round to Celia:

“’Pon my word,” she exclaimed, “one might have one’s shop taken away wholesale and one’s self murdered, and they would never be the wiser unless they were fetched in; but let a poor chap be down in the mouth and in trouble, and they’re down upon him at every turn. I haven’t patience with ’em, the blundering thickheads that don’t know a man in trouble and bad health, from one that’s drunk.”

CHAPTER IX.

HOPE ON, HOPE EVER.

Hope, the befriending,

Does what she can, for she points evermore up to heaven, and faithful

Plunges her anchor’s peak in the depths of the grave, and beneath it
Paints a more beautiful world, a dim, but a sweet play of shadows!

Children of the Lord’s Supper.

BUT although good Mrs. Jones tried her very best to find out some news of my poor Dick’s wife, she did not succeed in her efforts. Apparently Nell was as entirely forgotten by every one in the neighborhood as if she had been blotted right out of existence.

It is easy enough for me to account for this, although it seemed strange then to those who were seeking her with such zealous assiduity, for the very qualities which had first

made her charming to Dick and had kept her from becoming friendly with good Mrs. Jones, had also made her keep herself very much to herself among a set of people who were certainly not likely to do her any good or even to attract her in any way.

Then, too, a poor neighborhood changes rapidly. When there is not much furniture to move, when a family can go from one room into another without the expense and trouble of art-decorations, without fitting carpets to floors or blinds to windows, why then a removal becomes an easy matter, and three of them are by no means as bad as one fire. And it must be remembered that old granny had been dead nearly two years, and since then Nell had had neither the need nor the inclination to go near the street again.

"I've done my very best," Mrs. Jones said to Dick, when he went to her the next evening, "but I can find out nothing about her at all. One man told me that he saw her about six months ago in Oxford Street, and that she seemed in pretty good case; but he didn't speak to her."

"Oh! *why* didn't he speak to her?" Dick cried, impatiently.

"Ah! so he would if he'd known how much difference it might have made to you," good Mrs. Jones answered. "But don't be down-hearted about it, Mr. Trevor," she added.

"Try to have patience and, depend upon it, some news or other will be turning up about her."

"I should like to go and have a talk to the chap that saw her," said Dick, wistfully.

"Why, you can do that easy enough," Mrs. Jones replied. "I'll write down his name and address on a bit of paper. There, that's it. And now, Mr. Trevor, remember if there's any other little thing that I can do to help you, I'll always be ready and willing to do it; or if there's

any advice I can give you, why, just come to me and I'll be ready to serve in the best way I can."

"Mrs. Jones," said Dick, in a trembling voice, and with a mist in front of his eyes, "when I find my wife I shall bring her to thank you for all you've done for me, and tried to do. She'll be able to—*I can't*."

"Well, it's but little I've had the power to do," said Mrs. Jones, modestly. "I only wish I'd been able to do more than just try."

"Ah, but you had the heart!" cried my poor Dick, gratefully, "and Dick Trevor ain't one as 'll ever forget that."

Well, after this Dick went in search of the man whose name and address Mrs. Jones had written down for him. He found a quiet respectable middle-aged person, busy tailoring. To him Dick explained his errand.

"Ay, to be sure," said the tailor, stitching away as if for dear life. "Sit you down in the big chair there and make yerself at 'ome. Yes, I did see yer wife, though I didn't know her as such until Mrs. Jones mentioned the matter to me the other day. Yes, I met her a matter o' six months ago in Oxford Street."

"And you didn't speak to her?" Dick asked.

"Well now, I didn't. You see, I was hurrying up to my governor's with some work and she was walking pretty sharply along the other way, and so I just says: 'Good-day to you, Miss Fielding,' and that was all."

"And was she alone?" Dick asked, eagerly.

"Yes; quite by herself," answered the little tailor, keeping his attention fixed on his work.

"H'm!" Then there was a pause—a pause during which my poor Dick was trying to nerve himself to ask a question which was, he felt, a dishonor to his darling, and which yet arose in his mind again and again, hour after hour, with persistent regularity—"And—er—was she looking pretty well?"

"So far as I can remember," the little tailor answered.

"And she was alone, you say?"

"Yes, she was alone," the other answered.

"You didn't notice how she was dressed, I suppose?"

"Well, I did rather," the tailor replied. "You see it was in May, and May was 'orrid cold this year; and it 'appened to be a remarkable bright day, but 'orrid cold, and I did notice that she had a very fresh color and that she had plenty of dark fur about her."

My poor Dick gave a sick shiver—it was like a blow in the face to him to hear of his darling being wrapped in furs.

"Did she—did she—look—like—" he began hesitatingly, when the little tailor cast a sharp glance at him and finished the sentence.

"Like a gay lady? Not the least in the world," he said with decision.

My poor Dick breathed more freely.

"Or—or—as if she'd got—" but he could not say the words, but put his finger to his lip and sat looking at the little tailor as if he ought to know what he meant.

"Got married again?" the other suggested. "Is that what you mean? Well, as to that, I couldn't really say. I didn't see any one with her. She looked tolerably bright and brisk, though a good deal altered from what she was a year or two ago. She was evidently out on business, and was nipping smartly along, without turning her 'ead right 'and nor left."

"Thank you, mister," said Dick, getting up from the chair and standing beside the little tailor's high bench. "You've took a great load off my mind by saying that. And if you happen to meet her again, you won't pass her by, will you? but—but perhaps you'll stop her, and say that I'm back in England, and if she—if she wants to hear of me she can go to Mrs. Jones. Perhaps you'll tell her that, will you?"

“And to be sure I will,” cried the little man, heartily. “I only wish I’d stopped that day. She might have told me where she was living, and so I might have ’ad better news for you. But I ’ope you’ll soon ’ear tell of her, I’m sure, that I do—that I do,” and then he vigorously shook Dick’s hand, as if doing it thoroughly he could help him to find his darling again.

Half a dozen such slight clews did Dick follow up, and with as little success, and then, when nearly a month had gone by and his Indian savings began to dwindle—for he spent a good sum in advertisements in the daily papers—he began to wonder what he should do in the future to make a living for himself?

Of course he had his pension for wounds, but then that did not amount to much, only one and twopence a day. He could not live on that, although it would be a very pleasant supplement to his ordinary earnings. Still, at present he was not earning anything, and with each day, in spite of his anxiety about his wife, he was getting stronger and his health was improving. But what to do—what line to try for, that is—he could not make up his mind. He wanted to be somewhere in town—to be within a walk of Oxford Street, if the truth be told, for it was there or thereabout that he had the greatest hopes of meeting Nell. Yet what was there that he could do? He was a blacksmith by trade, a soldier by profession, and it was a combination which left him stranded, so far as the heart of London was concerned. He could think of nothing but being a policeman—a policeman he thought would have the better chance of being about in the streets than any one else.

But the authorities declined to have him, for there was still a weakness of his left arm, which might prove awkward at awkward times—for instance, in a street row or when dealing with an extra troublesome prisoner.

“But I shouldn’t wonder if the commissionaires couldn’t

find a place for you, my man," said the official who explained to him that the police force was a hopeless end for him. "They have plenty of light and easy places there, and, as your character is so good, I fancy you would have no difficulty with them."

"At all events I'll try it, sir," said Dick, to whom the suggestion was a heavenly one.

"Yes. Stay, I'll give you a note to Sir Edward; it mayn't do you much good, but it won't do you any harm."

My poor Dick expressed his gratitude very fully, and, armed with the note, went off to find his way to the Commissioners' Barracks in the Strand. There he found a smart commissioner standing at the end of the passage which leads into the court in which the head-quarters of the corps are, and to this person Dick addressed himself—could he tell him where he should find Sir Edward Walter?

The commissioner answered the question with promptness and civility, and then Dick was emboldened to put a few questions about the corps and the kind of life which its members led.

The replies which he received made him determine to get into the corps if it was possible to do it, and as his character was of the best and he had left the service with the rank of sergeant, he had not much doubt about being admitted if the state of his arm was not considered too great a disadvantage to him.

So he went up to the office and sent in his letter to Sir Edward, and waited patiently for the result, which was that he was told to "walk this way," and then he was taken into another office, where he was ushered into the presence of a gentleman, who asked him some questions and then informed him that he must fill up these papers—or this paper, rather—and send in his application in the regular way.

Dick gathered that this was not the Sir Edward of whom his acquaintance outside had spoken, and then, with the

stiffest of salutes, he bowed himself out and betook himself away.

He found his new friend still at the entrance, and he accosted him cheerfully:

“Well, mate, what luck did you have?”

“Oh! I think it’s all right,” said Dick. “I’ve got a paper to fill up—the usual thing, I suppose.”

“Yes. Take my advice, put in every trifle you can about yourself, and then you’ll find yourself billeted in one of the jolliest clubs in all London,” said his new friend, kindly.

“I will,” returned Dick, then added a pleasant good-day and passed on, making his way to his friend Mrs. Jones’s, where he knew he could depend upon getting a quiet half hour and a decent pen and ink, with which to accomplish his task.

And I can tell you it was a very formidable array of questions that the paper presented to him—questions that there was no getting over, or under, or round—questions which it was good for him that he could answer honestly and well.

Of course it was easy to say how old he was and where he was born, what his height was, and that he had a second-class certificate of education.

But these were only a few of them. For he found that he had to give particulars of his occupation previous to enlisting, and also to give the date of that interesting event, and that of his discharge. He had to say whether he had been an officer’s servant or a musician during the time he had been in the army, and to state whether he had followed his own or any other trade while he had been in her majesty’s service.

Then he had to explain the cause of his discharge, to give full details of his service at home and abroad, such as this: “England, 7·8·76-3·7·78; East Indies, 1·8·78-4·10·78; Afghanistan, 5·10·78-17·8·80.”

I may as well tell you frankly, my gentle readers, that this is as Greek or double Dutch to me, and I half believe it was the same to my poor Dick, for he frowned and pulled down the corners of his mouth, and stared hard at the paper—made out half a dozen calculations on a scrap of paper, and finally evolved the set of figures above, which he put down under Question 14.

He had less trouble in putting down the rank and dates of all promotions, and in specifying the badges, medals, and other distinctions (where and when gained); that was simple enough, and ran like this: “Afghanistan, including Battle of ALI BOGAN, medal with two clasps.”

He had to give full particulars of his wound and to state that his pension was one and twopence a day; to state that he was a Protestant by religion; and that he was able and willing to undertake the duties of a commissionaire.

But there were several questions which bothered him sadly how to answer—not those which had to be filled in by an officer, for the officers then with the depot knew him and would fill them in willingly enough, he knew. No! but the question was he married or single?—that was the awkward one of all.

At last, however, he answered it by saying “Married. I lost sight of my wife when I went into Afghanistan, and can find no trace of her.” Yet this, he felt, would not do—so the next day, armed with the form of registry, he went off to head-quarters again and asked, as a special favor, if he might see the commandant himself. So he was shown into Sir Edward’s presence, and then he summoned up his best courage to tell his story—for, mind, it is no light thing to face a stranger, even if he be the kindest and most considerate of men, and lay bare to him the inmost grief of one’s heart—but my poor Dick did it somehow, and he did not lose by doing it.

For in a very short time—as soon as the necessary forms could be observed, in truth—he found himself a member

of the corps of commissionaires; as his friend of the end of the passage leading to head-quarters put it, "billeted in the jolliest club in London."

CHAPTER X.

THE UNEXPECTED ALWAYS HAPPENS.

We have not wings, we can not soar;
But we have feet to scale and climb
By slow degrees, by more and more,
The cloudy summits of our time.

The Ladder of St. Augustine.

Turn, turn, my wheel! Turn round and round,
Without a pause, without a sound:
So spins the flying world away.

Keramos.

FOR nearly two years my poor Dick remained in the commissionaires, without anything unusual happening to disturb the ordinary current of his life. His health improved, and although his arm was still weak and at times gave him a good deal of pain which made the left hand almost useless, he had become so deft with the right hand that when the left one was disabled he scarcely missed the use of it.

And he proved himself an excellent member of the corps—quick, intelligent, even-tempered, and very obliging and eminently trustworthy; and, moreover, during the whole of that time he remained at the same post, in the employment of a great firm of upholsterers whose place of business was not ten minutes' walk from head-quarters.

It must be owned that he was as happy as a man suffering from the worry of a continual and ever-present anxiety could be. He liked his work, was perfectly comfortable in his quarters, and wanted for nothing except his Nell—the young wife he had left behind him, whom he never found, of whom he could find not the very smallest trace.

He felt convinced that she was not anywhere in that neighborhood, for his post kept him during the whole of the days of the whole week (except Sundays) at the door of the large shop at which he was employed, and which was situated in one of the principal thoroughfares in London; but though he kept his keen eyes ever on the watch for a glimpse of the sweet modest face that would be always graven on his heart, it never came. Pretty women there passed him by the hundred, but never one Nell!

Just at first, when his day's work was over, he used to prowl round the theaters, and keep on the watch all the evenings as well as all the days; but after a little while he found that he was taking more out of himself than he actually had in him. So he had to give up the nightly prowling lest he might be compelled to give up his daily duty, and he knew that it was best and wisest to do so, because if there was any chance of coming across his Nell by accident, he would be more likely to do so in the open street than by hanging about the doors of theaters and such like places. Nor was he at a loss where he should spend his evenings. Very often he went to his good friend Mrs. Jones, who was kindness itself to him, and in her heart believed that his Nell was a faithless jade who had deliberately deserted him. I think good Mrs. Jones had come to have but little sympathy with my poor Dick's longings after the apparently unattainable, and thought it only a thousand pities that such a steady, respectable, well-conducted fellow, in well-paid and regular employment, should be wasting his life in a vain regret.

And then Celia was very kind to him!

Now Celia's mother had on the very first day of her acquaintance with Dick impressed upon her daughter the fact that he was a married man, and in trouble, and not for her, and therefore Celia never in any way gave her mother to imagine that she took the very smallest interest in their friend. Yet she did. She took a very great and

deep interest in everything that he did and in everything that concerned him. Poor little dreamy Celia! It was only a girl's foolish fancy, a foolish fancy which lived upon nothing, or next door to nothing. For my poor Dick, with his heart aching for his Nell, with frequent pain in his arm and a general feeling of emptiness in all his life, took no more notice of the buxom fresh-colored girl in Mrs. Jones's little shop or parlor than he did of the gray kitten lying curled up in the big chair by the fire—nay, scarcely quite so much, for Dick never passed by the kitten without a kind word or a caress, and, as it laid aside its kittenish airs and took upon itself the graces of a matron, pussy grew to know Dick well, and to show her affection for him in many a purr and a miaou, with much arching of her sleek back and waving to and fro of her handsome tail.

But poor little plump and pretty Celia could never show her feelings in such fashion. She could give no sign beyond a shy pleased glance when he came, or a deepening of the already bright color upon her cheeks and perhaps a flutter of the modest maidenly heart, or a smothered sigh at the thought of that shadowy Nell who stood like a thick and impervious cloud between Dick and her, between her and, as she fondly believed, her happiness.

Poor foolish little girl! And yet it was not altogether unreasonable or unnatural. For although my poor Dick had lost his wife and lived in a continual fever of expectation and anxiety, he had not lost the brave and bonny pair of eyes which had first made his Nell think him the handsomest fellow she had ever seen, and though he but seldom smiled now, yet it was the same smile after all when it did come.

And in a great measure he was the same Dick still; still long and lithe, with the same shade of a swagger about his walk and every now and again the old debonair gestures and turn of the head. Ah, yes, there was enough of the

old Dick left to have played sad havoc with Celia Jones's girlish fancy. Poor little Celia!

Then sometimes he went round to see his little friend the tailor, whom he always found hard at work on his board, and who seemed to him to shrivel up into smaller and smaller space every time that he saw him.

He was not a very interesting old person, nor did Dick find him at all entertaining company. But he was the last person he knew who had seen Nell, and that fact made him sacred in Dick's eyes.

Their conversation was generally limited to a—"Well, my lad, and how is the world a-using you?"

"Pretty well, Mr. Simmons, thank you," was Dick's invariable answer, and then, poor lad, he would give a sigh and say: "I don't hear any news, somehow."

Time had been when the little tailor had eagerly asked for news of the missing wife, but gradually he got to wait until Dick said something, for he could never be quite sure how he would take the mention of her.

And then there were plenty of good fellows in the regi—no, I mean the corps, with whom Dick sometimes spent his evenings, and so the time passed by without interruption, or any unusual event, until close upon two years had gone over his head. And then an event happened, a disagreeable one, which put him on the shelf for a bit, for one evening as he was going home to head-quarters his attention was attracted to a child crossing the road in the busiest part where Trafalgar Square and several other streets join—I mean on that side of the square out of which Northumberland Avenue now runs. Like most other events, it was all over in a moment—there was a piercing scream from the child, a shout from the driver of the nearest 'bus, a rush forward on Dick's part, and then an apparent congestion of everything, Dick's heart included.

And a few minutes afterward, when the crowd began to

clear away, it was told that the child was safe but that the commissionaire who had gone forward so pluckily to save him had just been carried into Charing Cross Hospital with a broken leg—if not with something worse.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SOUND OF A VOICE.

Oh! there is something in that voice that reaches
The innermost recesses of my spirit.

The Divine Tragedy.

When she had passed, it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music.

Evangeline.

I MUST confess that trouble and disappointment had not taken all the old Adam out of my poor Dick. When the heavy wheel of a huge van went over his leg he gave a great gasp, and the next moment was unconscious of all that was going on around him, and when he came to himself half a dozen stalwart fellows had him in their arms, not having waited for a stretcher, and were just carrying him up the steps of the hospital.

“The little chap?” said Dick, faintly. He felt very sick and dizzy, and much as if the men who were carrying him were all excessively drunk and he was too weak to get out of their clutches.

“Don’t worry yourself,” one of them answered, however. “The young shaver hadn’t a scratch upon him.”

“But I’ve broken my leg,” said Dick, and then he added, in an under-tone, “D—n the brat; why couldn’t he keep out of the road, I wonder?”

Broken my poor Dick’s leg did in truth prove to be, and he had to suffer a good deal more beside that first awful wrench and the dull aching which followed his return to consciousness, before he was laid right and straight in his

cot, with the prospect of remaining there for at least six weeks to come.

I won't go so far as to say that my poor Dick actually *regretted* having saved the youngster's life, but he certainly did d—n him very vigorously many and many a time during the weary and tiresome days which followed. For a broken leg is a very painful and patience-needing business, and as Dick's breakage was inconveniently near the ankle, he had to have his leg put into a plaster of Paris affair, which made him feel as if he had been half buried already.

He was not without his pleasures, though; his commandant came in one morning to see him, and also the surgeon of the corps, and several of his comrades looked in and bade him cheer up and be as jolly as he could. And then Mrs. Jones came, and even his little friend the tailor, who had spruced himself up in all his best and went away leaving Dick with the firm impression that, judging from the unusual bulk, he must have had at least half a dozen waistcoats on under his coat.

And yet, in spite of all the kindness that was shown to him, it was but a dreary business, after all, to a man accustomed to be all day long in the busy streets. The doctors, one and all, seemed to take a special interest in him; the nurses were never weary or impatient with him, no matter how often he was both; he had every comfort, nay, more, every luxury that his appetite could fancy, and more illustrated papers than he had strength to look at. Still it was only an hospital life, and he felt sickly and ill, and suffered much from cramp in his broken leg. He kept wondering, too, if he would always have "a dickey leg, as he had a dickey arm?" and if he would have to leave the corps, and live on his one and twopence a day?

And so a fortnight went over. He began almost to feel reconciled to his accident, and ceased to feel hardly of the youngster who had brought it on him—in fact, when the mother of the child, specially washed and dressed for the

occasion, came in one afternoon, and, with trembling lips and a break in her voice, told him that the lad was all that she had left of eight, and that her husband was then lying very ill of pleurisy, he pulled himself together and said that he was glad he had been able to do her the service.

"But I wish as 'ow you 'adn't broke your leg!" the poor soul cried, the tears, which had only darkened her eyes gathering together and running slowly down her wan cheeks; "it do seem 'ard on you; and mebbe you've a wife and children of your own at 'ome to think of."

"I've no one dependent on me," said Dick, with a choking sigh, "so you may make your mind easy on that score, missis."

And then she went away, and Dick was left to lie alone and think how different it all might have been if he had had some one dependent on him—if he had had that home, such as the child's mother had spoken of.

It was in the winter-time of the year, and already the afternoon was drawing in and the dusk of the evening was stealing through the long ward. It often happened that they were late in lighting the gas, more especially when visitors were still lingering beside the beds, whispering soft and low to those whom they had come to see; and on this evening it seemed to Dick either that the gloaming had fallen early, or that they were later than usual in lighting the lamps. Any way, he was lying half dozing, when suddenly he heard the sound of a voice—a voice which made him start upon his bed, his heart beating hard, and his brain whirling fast and furious—a voice out in the corridor, speaking to a nurse apparently, the voice which he had been aching, longing, praying, dying to hear ever since that last sad morning at Colchester when he had started on his journey to the shining East—the voice of her who was his heart's darling, his one dear love—his wife!

It was so dark that no one noticed him, no one saw the

trembling agitation which possessed him. He was still very weak, not strong enough to stand the strain of resting on his elbow for many minutes together, and with a sigh which was very near to a groan he sunk back in his bed again, trying to catch another sound, trying hard to call out to some one to stop her, to bring her to him.

But, alas! his trembling lips refused to utter a sound; life seemed to be fading out of all his weakened, trembling body, and before he could attract the attention of a single soul, my poor Dick's strength gave way altogether, and all around him was blotted out from his sight and hearing—for he had fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE TRACK.

Hearts that are fainting
Grow pale to overflowing;
And they that behold it
Marvel, and know not
That God at their fountains
Far off has been raining.

The Nun of Nirados.

Let me but hear thy voice, and I am happy;
For every tone, like some sweet incantation,
Calls up the buried past to plead for me.

The Spanish Student.

BUT it was not very long before the lamps were lighted, and the nurse in charge of my poor Dick saw with dismay that something had happened to upset him terribly. Quickly they brought restoratives, and by and by he came back to himself again—slowly and painfully, with a gasp and a sigh, wondering if he were dying until he remembered all at once that he had heard his dear love's voice in the corridor without, evidently speaking to one of the nurses.

“Oh, yes, thank you, nurse,” he had heard her say, “he is wonderfully better. He begins to look like himself again.”

There was a reply from the nurse, which he could not hear, and then that other voice spoke again.

“It is kind of you. I don’t know how to thank you enough. Yes, I have to go. I’m rather in a hurry. Good-bye.”

The nurse, who was his especial friend, bent down over him as he lay weak and trembling among his pillows trying to recall his darling’s exact words and tone.

“What made you go off like that? Is your leg paining you?”

“No.” He was still so agitated that he could hardly speak above a whisper. “But—but I thought I heard a voice I knew out there, and—it was too much for me.”

“A voice you knew—any one you wanted to see?” asked the nurse, kindly.

“Oh! yes—yes!” he almost shouted.

“I came straight in here, but there was only one person in the corridor. I spoke to her.”

“And her name?”

“Ah! that I don’t know, but I can find out easily enough, for she is the mother of a little child who was brought in several weeks ago suffering badly from a scald.”

“*A little child!*” Dick felt his head beginning to whirl again, and, for his darling’s sake, he knew that he must keep his wits about him. “A little child? I—I don’t think it could be the same. She—she had no child.”

“Let me see what she said,” said the nurse, with kindly patience. “She said that she found the child better, that he was almost himself again, and that she was in a hurry—”

“Yes, that was her,” Dick said, trembling more and more.

“Tell me her name,” said the nurse.

My poor Dick hesitated, for an idea had come into his mind—an idea which was torture, torture to him—an idea which suggested that his darling might have married again, and that their child—oh! God—oh! God—the cold sweat stood out upon his brow in great drops of agony only to think of it.

“Because I could soon find out.”

“Her name was Fielding,” he answered, faintly.

“Fielding! Ah—well, I’ll go and find out what the child’s name is—only, mind, I can’t have you going fainting about in this way. You must promise me to keep very still and quiet.”

“I will,” Dick answered, but as she was moving away he caught her back by her gown. “Nurse—tell me,” he said, “how big is the child?”

“Oh! quite a little fellow,” she replied.

Then she went away, and Dick thought it all over. A child—a child! She must have married again—she must have believed him dead—some horrible mistake must have come to part them—and he had found her again only to be worse than nothing to her.

For if, believing that he was dead—killed in action, perhaps—she had married again, she might be the happy mother of a family by this time, perhaps a happy wife, looking back upon her past as only a light and pleasant dream, too tender and too sweet to last.

And if that was so should he be the one to bring shame and dishonor upon her? Must his be the tongue which should proclaim to the world that she—his Nell—his wife—was—oh! no, it was too horrible. Why, sooner than bring such a shame and such a fate upon her, he would just lie there till he was pronounced fit to go out, and then he would take a cab down to the Embankment, to the place where he and Nell had done their love-making years ago under the big trees and the gas-lamps, and he would sit there till it was dark, and then he would walk quietly

down the steps, and—well, it would be all over; a splash, an inquiry, a day's wonder to his comrades, and he would be out of Nell's way forever.

He was so weak and so exhausted by the fearful excitement of the past hour that he lay perfectly still and almost fancied, when his thoughts reached that point, that he felt the chill clasp of the icy water about his heart. And so he lay until the nurse returned from her mission of inquiry.

"You said that name was Fielding," she began, in a tone of suppressed eagerness.

"It was," Dick answered.

"Then it can hardly be the same—but, oddly enough, the child's name is the same as yours."

"*As mine?*" Dick fairly gasped in his surprise.

"Yes—as yours. Richard Trevor—and his age three years!"

The horrible doubt in my poor Dick's mind grew blacker and blacker. Three years! And it was just four since he and Nell had parted in the little room at Colchester where they had been so happy, so happy.

"Do you think he can be any relation of yours?" the nurse asked.

"No," Dick answered, curtly; "I haven't any relations."

"Ah! well, of course, that settles it. But he's a jolly little chap, and a very fine child, too, for only three years old."

She went away then, being a busy person with many things to see after, leaving Dick to lie and brood over the knowledge that had just come to him.

As may be imagined, he did not get one wink of sleep that night, and when the morning came, it was a very gaunt and hollow-eyed Dick Trevor who met the doctor's searching gaze.

The doctor asked a few sharp questions, and told him to keep as quiet as possible, adding to the nurse that he would

send him a composing draught to be taken that night, then he passed on, and for half an hour Dick was left quite alone.

At the end of that time, however, his friend the nurse appeared with something in a cup—oh! strong beef-tea, which she wanted him to take.

Now Dick did not like beef-tea, and the nurse knew it; but to her surprise he took the cup out of her hand, and drained the contents thereof without waiting for a word of persuasion from her, or even making a single wry face.

“Why,” the nurse cried, “what has come to you?—you always make such a fuss over your beef-tea.”

“I want to get well soon!” he answered, “and I say, nurse, I wish you’d do something for me—will you?”

“Yes, if I can!” she answered, willingly enough, for Dick was a more interesting patient than usually fell to her charge.

“I’d like to see that little chap that has the same name as me,” he said; “do you think you could bring him down here to see me?”

The nurse looked a shade doubtful.

“Well, I’ll try,” she said at length, “but I don’t know that I shall be able to manage it. Certainly not until after dinner is over and all quiet.”

So Dick had no choice but to possess his soul in patience until the usual afternoon stillness should creep over the long wards. It seemed a long time in coming, but at last his nurse went off as if on her mission—at least he hoped so, though he did not ask for fear of her answer being a disappointment.

The nurse had, however, gone upon his errand. She found her way up to the children’s ward, and preferred her request very diffidently to the head thereof.

“There’s a poor fellow down in my ward,” she began—“one of the missionaries, who got his leg broken the other day by saving a child in the road from under a van,

and I was telling him yesterday about your little Dickey Trevor—being the same name as his own, you know; and he is so anxious to see the boy. I wonder if you'd let me carry him down for ten minutes?"

The nurse in charge looked doubtful.

"Would the child care to go? I can't have him upset—a fit of crying would throw him back dreadfully."

My poor Dick's nurse felt pretty confident on that point.

"Will Dickey go down with nursie?" she asked, in her most coaxing tones; "just to see a poor man in bed who wants so badly to see Dickey."

Dickey, too, looked doubtful, but eventually curiosity got the better of him, and he stretched out his arms toward the nurse's neck.

"I thought he'd come—the sweet little lad!" she cried; "I'll be very careful, and will bring him back in a few minutes."

"Or at once if he begins to cry," said the other, warningly, as the two reached the door.

But Dickey did not cry—did not, in fact, seem to think of it—and the good-natured nurse carried him carefully down and set him upon my poor Dick's bed.

"Here he is," she said, cheerfully, "and you're not to make him cry, and I have to take him back in ten minutes."

It must have been some instinct which made her turn away and go on with some trifling occupation which she had in hand, leaving them together. And so they had come at last face to face, the father and child who had no knowledge of one another—the father who did not know that the child was his, and the child who did not know that he had a father.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK AND DICKEY.

Faith alone can interpret life, and the heart that aches and bleeds with the stigma of pain, alone bears the likeness of Christ, and can comprehend its daily enigma.—*The Golden Legend.*

Thus by aspirations lifted,
By misgivings downward driven,
Human hearts are tossed and drifted
Midway between earth and heaven.

King Trisanku.

AFTER the nurse had set little Dickey down upon the bed and had turned away, my poor Dick lay and looked, with all his starved and aching heart shining out of his hollow eyes, at the child; and on his side the child, with his great blue eyes brimful of wonder and pity for the poor man whom he had been brought down-stairs to see, sat and stared solemnly at Dick.

But Dick, at last, made an effort, and spoke in his gentlest and tenderest tones:

“Well, little fellow,” he said, softly, “so you have come to see me. And do you know what my name is?”

The child shook his head, and shaped the word “No” with his lips, and his wondering eyes never stirred from Dick’s quivering face.

Dick tried to smile, and wondered what he should say next. The child, however, solved that question.

“Big man,” he said, confidentially, “is you going to cry?”

The suggestion brought a smile to Dick’s wan face, a very real smile, and he took the child’s two hands in his own.

“Cry—no! Big men don’t cry, you know. Did I look as if I were going to—hey?”

"Yes, I think you did," the child answered, then added, blessed innocent that he was: "My mammie cries sometimes—Dickey don't like her to."

Dick drew him a shade nearer to him.

"Does she cry? Tell me why."

But that was beyond the boy's power, and the wonder came back into his eyes again.

"I don't know, but I think mammie gets a pain just here," spreading his little hand out over his heart—"a drefful pain."

Dick gave a great sigh, and wondered!

"And what is your mammie called, my little chap?" he asked.

"Why, my mammie," answered Dickey, eying him with a contempt which said plainly that he ought to be ashamed of himself for asking such a silly question; "she's my mammie."

"And what are you?"

"Mammie's sweetheart-dear," returned Dickey, without a moment's hesitation.

"And hasn't mammie any other sweetheart?" Dick asked.

"I am mammie's sweetheart," Dickey explained, with dignity.

"Yes, but you have a da-da, surely?"

There, the words were out at last! My poor Dick blushed as they passed his lips, for he felt that they were an insult to his darling's goodness, which his heart *could* not doubt, though his reason equally could not help doing so.

Little Dickey entered into an elaborate explanation.

"Yes, I have a da-da," he said, knitting his brows together, and frowning with the anxiety of trying to make the big but stupid man on whose bed he was sitting understand him; "yes, I have a da-da; but he isn't here. He

wented away a long time ago, and my mammie doesn't think he'll ever come back any more—never any more."

"And what is he like?" My poor Dick spoke calmly, though his honest heart blazed up in one burst of fury, and the hand which he suddenly thrust out of sight under the bed-clothes would have liked dearly to pound the head of the brute, who had deserted his Nell, to a jelly. "And what is he like?" he repeated, as calmly as he was capable at that moment.

Dickey's curly golden head began to shake to and fro.

"You tell me," he said, persuasively.

So Dick was beaten again. It was evident that the child—fine, intelligent little chap as he was—was not able to give information which he did not possess, nor even to give expression to the knowledge which he might have.

"How old are you, my little man?" Dick asked.

"I'm three," Dickey answered, promptly.

"And what's your name?"

"Dickey," as if he ought to know without asking.

"Dickey what?"

"Dickey Trevor"—then, touching his breast, "that's me."

In spite of his anxiety to learn the truth, Dick could not help laughing out aloud, and just then the nurse came back to see how they were getting on.

"Well, are you tired of one another yet?" she asked cheerfully. "Ah! you've had enough of him, haven't you? You're looking tired, so I'll take him back. Would you like to go back to your own nurse now, Dickey?"

Dickey, who on the approach of another person had frozen into real baby shyness again, nodded and held out his hand to her.

"Then say good-bye and come along, my little man," said the nurse, pleasantly.

Dickey released his hand, and flung his two dear little arms round my poor Dick's neck. "Good-bye, big man,"

he said, and kissed him on the mouth, where no lips had touched him since that last sad morning in Colchester four weary years before.

Dick held him close to his breast for a moment.

"Take him along," he said to the nurse, "he's a jolly little chap; you must let him come and see me again."

"He shall," she answered. "I suppose you've not found out any relationship between you?"

"He's no relation of mine," answered Dick, shortly; then added, with a sigh, "I wish he was—but he isn't."

So she lifted the child in her arms and carried him off; and Dickey twined one little slender arm around her neck, and confided a secret to her: "Big man was crying," he whispered.

The nurse laughed.

"No, not crying, dearie," she told him; "but he is tired; he has been very ill, you know."

Yet, all the same, little Dickey's innocent remark had struck very near to the truth, and if my poor Dick was not crying at that moment—well, he was very, very near to it. For he was lying in his cot, trembling still from the touch of *her* child's baby lips upon his own! Her child, and the child that was not his. It is odd that there was no anger in his heart toward Nell—he understood, or thought that he understood, which amounted to the same thing, so well the utter loneliness in which he had left her, he who ought to have been beside her to the end of their two lives! So, instead of feeling anger against her, he was only angry and savage with the father of the little child, who yet bore his name—yes, his name! It struck him as strange that she should have chosen to call the child after him, and that she should still be bearing his name—and yet, he had it from the child's innocent baby lips that she often wept for him, and that her heart was aching still from the wound which he had caused in leaving her!

He hardly knew what to do! The picture of Nell alone

and in trouble went to the very bottom of his heart—the idea of putting himself quietly to sleep in the bosom of the Thames had faded away with the knowledge that it was no happy home which his appearance would disturb! He had some thought of confiding in his friend the nurse, and asking advice from her—then of sending for good Mrs. Jones; but no! He had a distinct remembrance of a doubtful look in Mrs. Jones's eyes when he had been declaring his belief in his darling's goodness. No; Mrs. Jones would not do, she would not do at all!

Well, he thought and he thought! He turned the whole matter over and over in his mind, but what to decide upon doing for the best he could not; finally, he made up his mind that the best and wisest course to take was to let things slide—to do nothing—to let events take their natural course.

In any case, when the morrow—visitors' day—came, she would have to pass the door close to which his bed stood! He might catch a word or two of her dear voice, even a glimpse of her sweet face, and, after the starvation he had lived through since he parted from her, that would be something! My poor Dick—oh! my poor Dick!

CHAPTER XIV.

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

The storm is over, and through the parting clouds the radiant sunshine breaks upon my path.

The Pilgrim's Salutation.

Bright was her face with smiles, and words of welcome and glad-
ness

Fell from her beautiful lips.

Evangeline.

I MAY as well say at once that the tumult of emotions through which my poor Dick had passed since he first

heard his darling's voice in the corridor had not been unnoticed by his especial nurse. Trust a woman long trained to the study of small signs to know when one of her patients had gone through such a struggle as his mental state had been. And Nurse Wilson, being of a nature which was observant above the ordinary, had put two and two together so very neatly that in her own mind they seemed never to have been other than four! She was puzzled, and yet she saw everything clearly—the likeness between the child and Dick, the circumstance of his fainting dead away when he heard the voice of the child's mother in the corridor, his agitation when he came to himself again, yet his declaration that he had no relations, and that the child was nothing to him, the child whose name was the same as his.

And yet it was puzzling! His declaration that the name of the woman whose voice he thought he had recognized was Fielding—yes, it was all very puzzling, but Nurse Wilson was quite sure in her own mind that the child was, in spite of Dick's assertion to the contrary, something to him, and that at some time or other he had been everything to the child's mother.

Well, having this idea firmly fixed in her mind, Nurse Wilson, during Friday evening and Saturday morning, did her best to keep her patient as quiet and calm as possible. It was an easy task, as it happened, for Dick was very weak and inclined to exhaustion after the boy had been carried back to his own ward again, so that he was content to lie perfectly still, turning things over in his mind, and looking forward, with a strange passionate awed kind of dread, to the chance he might possibly, if he were very lucky, have on the morrow of hearing her voice again. Then, in a sort of ecstasy, he thought of what life would become to him if they should meet, and she could explain away his doubts, or at least come to him and let herself be his own again—of what a life they would have together—how they

would go up to the park when the days began to get warm and bright, and they would sit together under the trees among the lords and ladies, and rank and fashion, just as they had done in their blissful blessed week of honeymoon.

Ah! well, well, it was only a dream, and dreams are at best but unsatisfactory affairs. My poor Dick awoke from it with a shiver and a sigh, and then—set himself to try and dream it all over again! So it may be believed Nurse Wilson had but little difficulty in keeping him composed and quiet.

But she contrived to be at the door of the ward when little Dickey's mother passed along the corridor on that Saturday afternoon on her way to the ward where the child was! And she greeted her kindly.

"Is that you?" she began—"come to see the little man again? You'll find him going on very nicely."

"Ah, I'm thankful for that," answered the sweet voice that reached Dick as he lay in his cot behind the door and sent the hot blood dancing to and fro in his veins as if it was all gone crazy; "for you don't know what an anxiety this accident has been to me. Of course, with my business to look after, I *couldn't* nurse him myself, but it was a trial to me to let him go away from me."

"How did the accident happen?" asked the nurse, in an interested tone.

"Well, you see, I had just gone in out of the shop—I'm a florist, you know—and I filled the tea-pot and put it on the table, and just as I turned to get the sugar-basin off the chiffonier, the poor little fellow had pulled the cloth and dragged the whole of the scalding tea over his chest and body. Oh, how frightened I was!" she ended.

"And you live quite alone? You had nobody to help you with him?"

"Not a soul! I have a woman who comes in to clean up every day, but she had gone. So I ran in for a neigh-

bor, and got his clothes off in a minute or two. And then I saw that it was a serious accident, for the skin peeled off his neck; and he cried, oh, how he cried! Poor little fellow, how thankful I was when they put the starch on and he was quiet a bit."

"Well, you'll have to be careful with him for a good bit yet," returned the nurse, with all her professional interest aroused. "He will feel the shock for a long time, and if he gets measles or whooping-cough, or any of those things, he'll not stand such a good chance of shaking them off as if he hadn't had this accident; feed him up well when you get him home again, and let him play about as much as ever you can; that's the best you can do for him."

"I will," the mother answered. "Well, I must be going up to him. Thank you so much, nurse, for all the interest you've taken in him. Good-bye—or perhaps I shall see you again."

"Very likely; I'm always about," Nurse Wilson answered, cheerily.

The child's mother, my poor Dick's wife, passed on her way, and the nurse turned back into the ward. Now Dick's bed lay just behind the door, and through the chink left when it was set open, he had hoped he might be able to catch a glimpse of his Nell as she passed. Yet, when he heard her speaking to the nurse, so near that he could have joined in the conversation as easily as possible without raising his voice, such a trembling took possession of him that he could not even lift himself on his elbow, and could only lie there helpless, and shaking in every limb.

He was still shaking when Nurse Wilson stopped at his bedside to speak to him, taking no notice of his condition.

"That was the child's mother," she remarked in a casual kind of way, and beginning diligently to tidy the bed-clothes, which were quite straight and did not need it.

"Yes, I heard it was," Dick replied, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

“You heard what she said, I dare say?”

Dick nodded.

“About the accident?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, poor little chap, he’ll feel the effects of it for many a day yet. Well, such accidents will happen. I often wonder there aren’t more of them, for it’s anything but easy for a body living alone to be after a child at every turn. And, poor little things, there’s so much that they mayn’t do.”

“He was very badly scalded?” Dick asked, trying hard to steady his voice.

“Yes, it was a bad case,” answered the nurse, who was more sure now than ever that he was the child’s father and that the mother did not know that he was in the hospital.

There was a moment’s silence; she set a bottle and glass straight with a niceness which was labor thrown away, and presently she added, still in the same chatty casual sort of tone:

“She is a florist.”

“Yes, I heard,” Dick answered, more distinctly.

“H’m—nice paying business, a florist’s, and clean—nothing nasty about it, and it’s generally among a superior class of people. Well, I must go and see about No. 5; he’s not so well to-day.”

She moved quietly away, leaving Dick to his thoughts again, and went to the side of bed No. 5, but, to her surprise and pleasure, its occupant was in an easy sound slumber—if the truth be told, the first good sleep that the poor fellow had had for days past.

Seeing this, the nurse crept softly—yes, they do tread softly in some London hospitals, and Charing Cross is one of them—away, and, finding all her patients pretty quiet, she slipped out of the ward, and went up to seek little Dickey Trevor’s mother, whom she found with Dickey on her knee, closely hugged up against her heart.

“Why, you’ll soon be able to take him home at this rate,” she remarked, cheerfully—Nurse Wilson was a very cheerful woman.

“Oh, very soon; but not till Dickey is quite well. Eh, Dickey?”

“But Dickey will soon be well now,” cried the child, smiling up at the nurse.

“And then Dickey must come and see us sometimes,” she said, laughing.

“Oh, yes, Dickey will come,” answered the child.

Nurse Wilson rested herself on the edge of the table beside which Nell was sitting, and pulled out the edge of her apron.

“Mrs. Trevor,” she said presently, “did you ever know any one called Fielding?”

“I knew myself,” replied Nell, smiling.

“Yourself! I don’t understand.”

“No? Well, my name was Fielding, that is all,” said Nell, simply.

“And you’re a widow?”

“Yes”—with a sigh. “Dickey and I are quite alone in the world—quite alone.”

“And your husband died—”

“My husband was drowned in the Caubool River during the war in Afghanistan. He had to leave me behind when the regiment went to India, and—and he never saw my Dickey—never even knew that he was coming. I’ve regretted it ever since, but he took the parting so to heart, poor lad, and I was real afraid to tell him. And then just when I got on at the florist’s business, and thought I might tell him everything, I got the news that he was drowned. My poor Dick,” she ended, with her eyes full of tears—“my poor darling Dick!”

“Mrs. Trevor,” said the nurse, “I’m going to say something that will startle you. But stay, tell me what regiment your husband was in?”

“In the Cuirassiers,” she answered, with a startled look.

“Look here,” said the nurse, “are you sure that he was drowned?”

“As sure as I can be.”

“Have you spoken to any one who saw the accident?”

“No; but I went to the War Office. I saw the official report.”

“Oh! official report—I don’t think much of that. Put the child down, and come with me. If I’ve made a mistake, you’ll forgive me, I know. But there’s a broken leg in my ward, called Richard Trevor, and I’d like you to see him.”

Nell put down the child as she was bidden, and stood up on her feet; but she was shaking in every limb, and could hardly stand.

“Why, my dear,” said the nurse, kindly, “this won’t do at all. Pull yourself together, and be calm. Remember that he has been very ill, and must not be upset.”

But poor Nell’s nerves were not in the best order. She could only whisper—“A drink,” and hold fast by the table. However, when she had had a drink of water, and had been soothed down by Nurse Wilson, she said that she felt able to go down and see the broken leg whose name was Richard Trevor.

I give you my word I don’t know how to write what happened next; it was all over so quickly, for there seemed to be but a bewildered stare from either of them after Nell had reached the bedside, a cry of “Dick, Dick, Dick!” from her, a sort of scuffle, and a sudden burst of passionate tears.

But the nurse drew the screen round the bed a bit, and whispered the story to the doctor, who had come in just at that moment to look at No. 5; and the doctor, who was young and sympathetic, lifted his eyebrows and smiled, passing on with a pleasant, “Why, nurse, you ought to have a medal, ’pon my word you ought.” And after that

it was wonderful how soon and how easily everything was explained, and how soon, too, my poor Dick got his old nerve back, and all the old debonair gayety of manner.

“But the little chap must be more than three?” he said, when Nell had fetched the boy and set him proudly upon the bed.

“Three and a half, Dick,” said Nell, with dignity. “He was born on the 3d of August.”

Before long Nell had to go, for the hour for visitors to leave had come; but though it was hard to leave her new-found joy so soon, yet it was with a different heart that she reached her little home again. It was small, but it was cozy, and it would be hers *and his*—and Nell looked round the little parlor with radiant smiles. She must have all made fresh and bright for him when he was well enough to come home—a few flowers here, a large arm-chair of a size for a big fellow like Dick, to stand in that corner; a tobacco-jar—oh, yes, of all things she must have a smart tobacco-jar, and—and— Then somehow my dear Nell slipped down upon her knees, and buried her face in the cushion of the sofa.

“Wicked woman that I am,” she cried, “to be so glad and have never a thought for Him that sent me my Dick back again. But I am grateful, I am. Father in Heaven above, I do thank Thee—oh! I do thank Thee!”

THE END.

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|--|----|---|----|
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| 618 Mistletoe Bough, The. Christmas, 1885. Edited by Miss M. E. Braddon..... | 20 | 649 Cradle and Spade. By William Sime..... | 20 |
| 619 Joy; or, The Light of Cold-Home Ford. By May Crommelin..... | 20 | 650 Alice; or, The Mysteries. (A Sequel to "Ernest Maltravers.") By Sir E. Bulwer Lytton..... | 20 |
| 620 Between the Heather and the Northern Sea. By M. Linskill | 20 | 651 "Self or Bearer." By Walter Besant..... | 10 |
| 621 Warden, The. By Anthony Trollope..... | 10 | 652 Lady With the Rubies, The. By E. Marlitt..... | 20 |
| 622 Harry Heathcote of Gangoil. By Anthony Trollope..... | 10 | 653 Barren Title, A. T. W. Speight | 10 |
| | | 654 "Us." An Old-fashioned Story. By Mrs. Molesworth..... | 10 |

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|---|----|---|----|
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| 669 Philosophy of Whist, The. By William Pole..... | 20 | 700 Ralph the Heir. By Anthony Trollope. Second half..... | 20 |
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| 671 Don Gesualdo. By "Ouida.".. | 10 | 701 Woman in White, The. Wilkie Collins. Illustrated. 2d half | 20 |
| 672 In Maremma. By "Ouida." 1st half..... | 20 | 702 Man and Wife. By Wilkie Collins. First half..... | 20 |
| 672 In Maremma. By "Ouida." 2d half..... | 20 | 702 Man and Wife. By Wilkie Collins. Second half..... | 20 |
| 673 Story of a Sin. By Helen B. Mathers..... | 20 | 703 House Divided Against Itself, A. By Mrs. Oliphant..... | 20 |
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| 682 In the Middle Watch. By W. Clark Russell..... | 20 | 711 Cardinal Sin, A. By Hugh Conway, author of "Called Back"..... | 20 |
| 683 Bachelor Vicar of Newforth, The. By Mrs. J. Harcourt-Roe | 20 | 712 For Maimie's Sake. By Grant Allen..... | 20 |
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| 685 England under Gladstone. 1880-1885. By Justin H. McCarthy, M.P..... | 20 | | |
| 686 Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. By Robert Louis Stevenson..... | 10 | | |
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|--|----|--|----|
| 713 "Cherry Ripe." By Helen B. Mathers..... | 20 | 747 Our Sensation Novel. Edited by Justin H. McCarthy, M.P. | 10 |
| 714 'Twixt Love and Duty. By Tighe Hopkins..... | 20 | 748 Hurrish: A Study. By the Hon. Emily Lawless..... | 20 |
| 715 I Have Lived and Loved. By Mrs. Forrester..... | 20 | 749 Lord Vanecourt's Daughter. By Mabel Collins..... | 20 |
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| 733 Lady Branksmere. By "The Duchess"..... | 20 | 765 Not Wisely, But Too Well. By Rhoda Broughton..... | 20 |
| 734 Viva. By Mrs. Forrester..... | 20 | 766 No. XIII.; or, The Story of the Lost Vestal. Emma Marshall | 10 |
| 735 Until the Day Breaks. By Emily Spender..... | 20 | 767 Joan. By Rhoda Broughton.. | 20 |
| 736 Roy and Viola. Mrs. Forrester | 20 | 768 Red as a Rose is She. By Rhoda Broughton..... | 20 |
| 737 Aunt Rachel. By David Christie Murray..... | 10 | 769 Cometh Up as a Flower. By Rhoda Broughton..... | 20 |
| 738 In the Golden Days. By Edna Lyall..... | 20 | 770 Castle of Otranto, The. By Horace Walpole..... | 10 |
| 739 Caged Lion, The. By Charlotte M. Yonge..... | 20 | 771 Mental Struggle, A. By "The Duchess"..... | 20 |
| 740 Rhona. By Mrs. Forrester.... | 20 | 772 Gascoyne, the Sandal-Wood Trader. By R. M. Ballantyne | 20 |
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| 743 Jack's Courtship. By W. Clark Russell. 1st half..... | 20 | 775 Three Clerks, The. By Anthony Trollope..... | 20 |
| 743 Jack's Courtship. By W. Clark Russell. 2d half..... | 20 | 776 Père Goriot. By H. De Balzac | 20 |
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- 781 Secret Dispatch, The. By James Grant..... 10
- 782 Closed Door, The. By F. Du Boisgobey. 1st half..... 20
- 782 Closed Door, The. By F. Du Boisgobey. 2d half..... 20
- 783 Chantry House. By Charlotte M. Yonge. 20
- 784 Two Miss Flemings, The. By author of "What's His Offence?" 20
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- 790 Chaplet of Pearls, The; or, The White and Black Ribaultmont. Charlotte M. Yonge. 2d half 20
- 791 Mayor of Casterbridge, The. By Thomas Hardy..... 20
- 792 Set in Diamonds. By Charlotte M. Braeme, author of "Dora Thorne"..... 20
- 793 Vivian Grey. By the Rt. Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. First half..... 20
- 793 Vivian Grey. By the Rt. Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield. Second half... 20
- 794 Beaton's Bargain. By Mrs. Alexander..... 20
- 795 Sam's Sweetheart. By Helen B. Mathers..... 20
- 796 In a Grass Country. By Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron..... 20
- 797 Look Before You Leap. By Mrs. Alexander..... 20
- 798 Fashion of this World, The. By Helen B. Mathers..... 10
- 799 My Lady Green Sleeves. By Helen B. Mathers..... 20
- 800 Hopes and Fears; or, Scenes from the Life of a Spinster. Charlotte M. Yonge. 1st half 20
- 800 Hopes and Fears; or, Scenes from the Life of a Spinster. Charlotte M. Yonge. 2d half 20
- 801 She Stoops to Conquer, and The Good-Natured Man. By Oliver Goldsmith..... 10
- 802 Stern Chase, A. By Mrs. Cashel-Hoey..... 20
- 803 Major Frank. By A. L. G. Bosboom-Toussaint..... 20
- 804 Living or Dead. By Hugh Conway, author of "Called Back" 20
- 805 Freres, The. By Mrs. Alexander. 1st half..... 20
- 805 Freres, The. By Mrs. Alexander. 2d half..... 20
- 806 Her Dearest foe. By Mrs. Alexander. First half..... 20
- 806 Her Dearest foe. By Mrs. Alexander. Second half..... 20
- 807 If Love Be Love. D. Cecil Gibbs 20
- 808 King Arthur. Not a Love Story. By Miss Mulock..... 20
- 809 Witness My Hand. By the author of "Lady Gwendolen's Tryst"..... 10
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- 811 Head Station, The. By Mrs. Campbell-Praed..... 20
- 812 No Saint. By Adeline Sergeant 20
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- 815 Ralph Wilton's Weird. By Mrs. Alexander..... 10
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- 817 Stabbed in the Dark. By Mrs. E. Lynn Linton..... 10
- 818 Pluck. By John Strange Winter 10
- 819 Fallen Idol, A. By F. Anstey... 20
- 820 Doris's Fortune. By Florence Warden..... 20
- 821 World Between Them, The. By Charlotte M. Braeme, author of "Dora Thorne"..... 20
- 822 Passion Flower, A. A Novel... 20
- 823 Heir of the Ages, The. By James Payn..... 20
- 824 Her Own Doing. W. E. Norris 10
- 825 Master Passion, The. By Florence Marryat..... 20
- 826 Cynic Fortune. By D. Christie Murray..... 20
- 827 Effie Ogilvie. By Mrs. Oliphant 20
- 828 Prettiest Woman in Warsaw, The. By Mabel Collins..... 20
- 829 Actor's Ward, The. By the author of "A Fatal Dower".... 20
- 830 Bound by a Spell. Hugh Conway, author of "Called Back" 20
- 831 Pomegranate Seed. By the author of "The Two Miss Flemings," etc..... 20
- 832 Kidnapped. By Robert Louis Stevenson..... 20
- 833 Ticket No. "9672." By Jules Verne. First half..... 10
- 833 Ticket No. "9672." By Jules Verne. Second half..... 10
- 834 Ballroom Repentance, A. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... 20
- 835 Vivian the Beauty. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... 20
- 836 Point of Honor, A. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... 20

- | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|
| 837 Vagabond Heroine, A. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 10 | 865 Written in Fire. By Florence Marryat..... | 20 |
| 838 Ought We to Visit Her? By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 20 | 866 Miss Harrington's Husband; or, Spiders of Society. By Florence Marryat..... | 20 |
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| 840 One Thing Needful; or, The Penalty of Fate. By Miss M. E. Braddon..... | 20 | 868 Petronel. By Florence Marryat..... | 20 |
| 841 Jet: Her Face or Her Fortune? By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 10 | 869 Poison of Asps, The. By Florence Marryat..... | 10 |
| 842 Blue-Stocking, A. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 10 | 870 Out of His Reckoning. By Florence Marryat..... | 10 |
| 843 Archie Lovell. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 20 | 871 Bachelor's Blunder, A. By W. E. Norris..... | 20 |
| 844 Susan Fielding. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 20 | 872 With Cupid's Eyes. By Florence Marryat..... | 20 |
| 845 Philip Earnscliffe; or, The Morals of May Fair. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 20 | 873 Harvest of Wild Oats, A. By Florence Marryat..... | 20 |
| 846 Steven Lawrence. By Mrs. Annie Edwards. 1st half..... | 20 | 874 House Party, A. By "Ouida"..... | 10 |
| 846 Steven Lawrence. By Mrs. Annie Edwards. 2d half..... | 20 | 875 Lady Valworth's Diamonds. By "The Duchess"..... | 20 |
| 847 Bad to Beat. By Hawley Smart..... | 10 | 876 Mignon's Secret. John Strange Winter..... | 10 |
| 848 My Friend Jim. By W. E. Norris..... | 20 | 877 Facing the Footlights. By Florence Marryat..... | 20 |
| 849 Wicked Girl, A. Mary Cecil Hay..... | 20 | 878 Little Tu'penny. By S. Baring-Gould..... | 10 |
| 850 Playwright's Daughter, A. By Mrs. Annie Edwards..... | 10 | 879 Touchstone of Peril, The. By R. E. Forrest..... | 20 |
| 851 Cry of Blood, The. By F. Du Boisgobey. First half..... | 20 | 880 Son of His Father, The. By Mrs. Oliphant..... | 20 |
| 851 Cry of Blood, The. By F. Du Boisgobey. Second half..... | 20 | 881 Mohawks. In Two Parts, each..... | 20 |
| 852 Under Five Lakes; or, The Cruise of the "Destroyer." By M. Quad..... | 20 | 882 Children of Gibeon. By Walter Besant..... | 20 |
| 853 True Magdalen, A. By Charlotte M. Braeme, author of "Dora Thorne"..... | 20 | 883 Once Again. By Mrs. Forrester..... | 20 |
| 854 Woman's Error, A. By Charlotte M. Braeme, author of "Dora Thorne"..... | 20 | 884 Voyage to the Cape, A. By W. Clark Russell..... | 20 |
| 855 Dynamiter, The. By Robert Louis Stevenson and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson..... | 20 | 885 Les Misérables. Victor Hugo. Part I..... | 20 |
| 856 New Arabian Nights. By Robert Louis Stevenson..... | 20 | 885 Les Misérables. Victor Hugo. Part II..... | 20 |
| 857 Kildee; or, The Sphinx of the Red House. By Mary E. Bryan. First half..... | 20 | 885 Les Misérables. Victor Hugo. Part III..... | 20 |
| 857 Kildee; or, The Sphinx of the Red House. By Mary E. Bryan. Second half..... | 20 | 886 Paston Carew, Millionaire and Miser. Mrs. E. Lynn Linton..... | 20 |
| 858 Old Ma'm'selle's Secret. By E. Marlitt..... | 20 | 887 Modern Telemachus, A. By Charlotte M. Yonge..... | 20 |
| 859 Ottilie: An Eighteenth Century Idyl, and The Prince of the 100 Soups. By Vernon Lee..... | 20 | 888 Treasure Island. Robert Louis Stevenson..... | 10 |
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| 864 "No Intentions." By Florence Marryat..... | 20 | 893 Love's Conflict. By Florence Marryat. First half..... | 20 |
| | | 893 Love's Conflict. By Florence Marryat. Second half..... | 20 |
| | | 894 Doctor Cupid. By Rhoda Broughton..... | 20 |
| | | 895 Star and a Heart, A. By Florence Marryat..... | 10 |
| | | 896 Guilty River, The. By Wilkie Collins..... | 20 |

- 897 Ange. By Florence Marryat... 20
- 898 Bulldog and Butterfly, and Julia and Her Romeo, by David Christie Murray, and Romeo and Juliet, by William Black. 20
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- 900 Woman's Wit, By. By Mrs. Alexander..... 20
- 901 Lucky Disappointment, A. By Florence Marryat..... 10
- 902 Poor Gentleman, A. By Mrs. Oliphant..... 20
- 903 Phyllida. By Florence Marryat 20
- 904 Holy Rose, The. By Walter Besant..... 10
- 905 Fair-Haired Alda, The. By Florence Marryat..... 20
- 906 World Went Very Well Then, The. By Walter Besant..... 20
- 907 Bright Star of Life, The. By B. L. Farjeon..... 20
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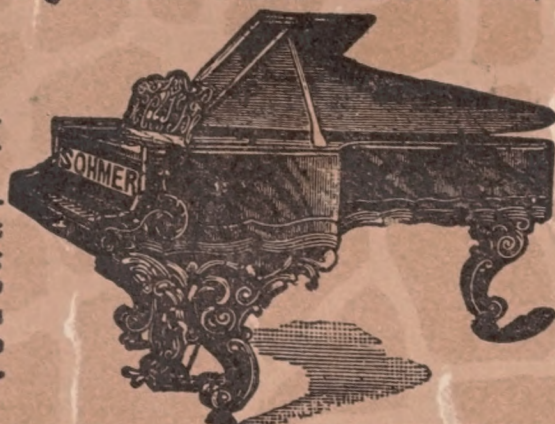
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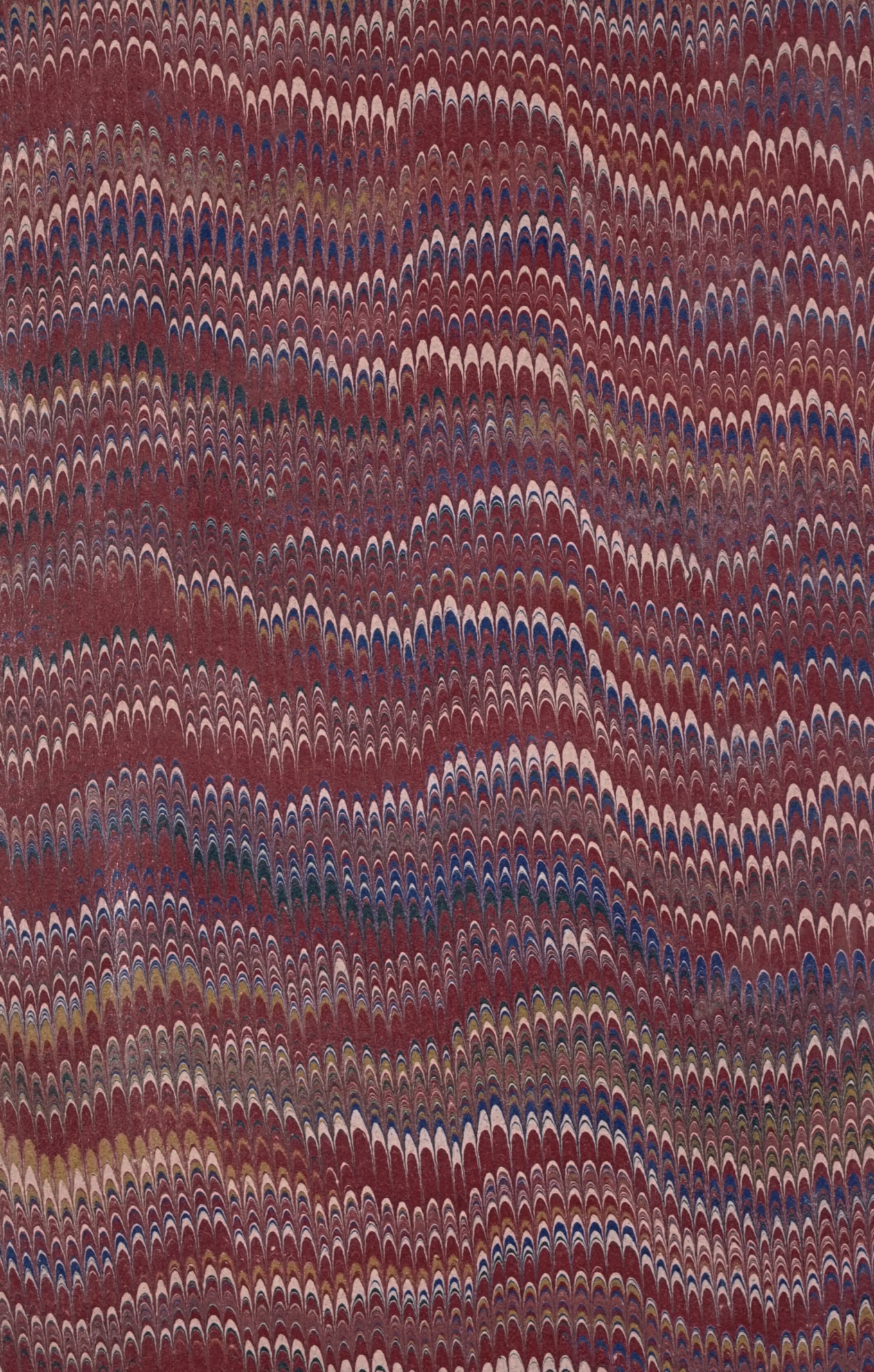
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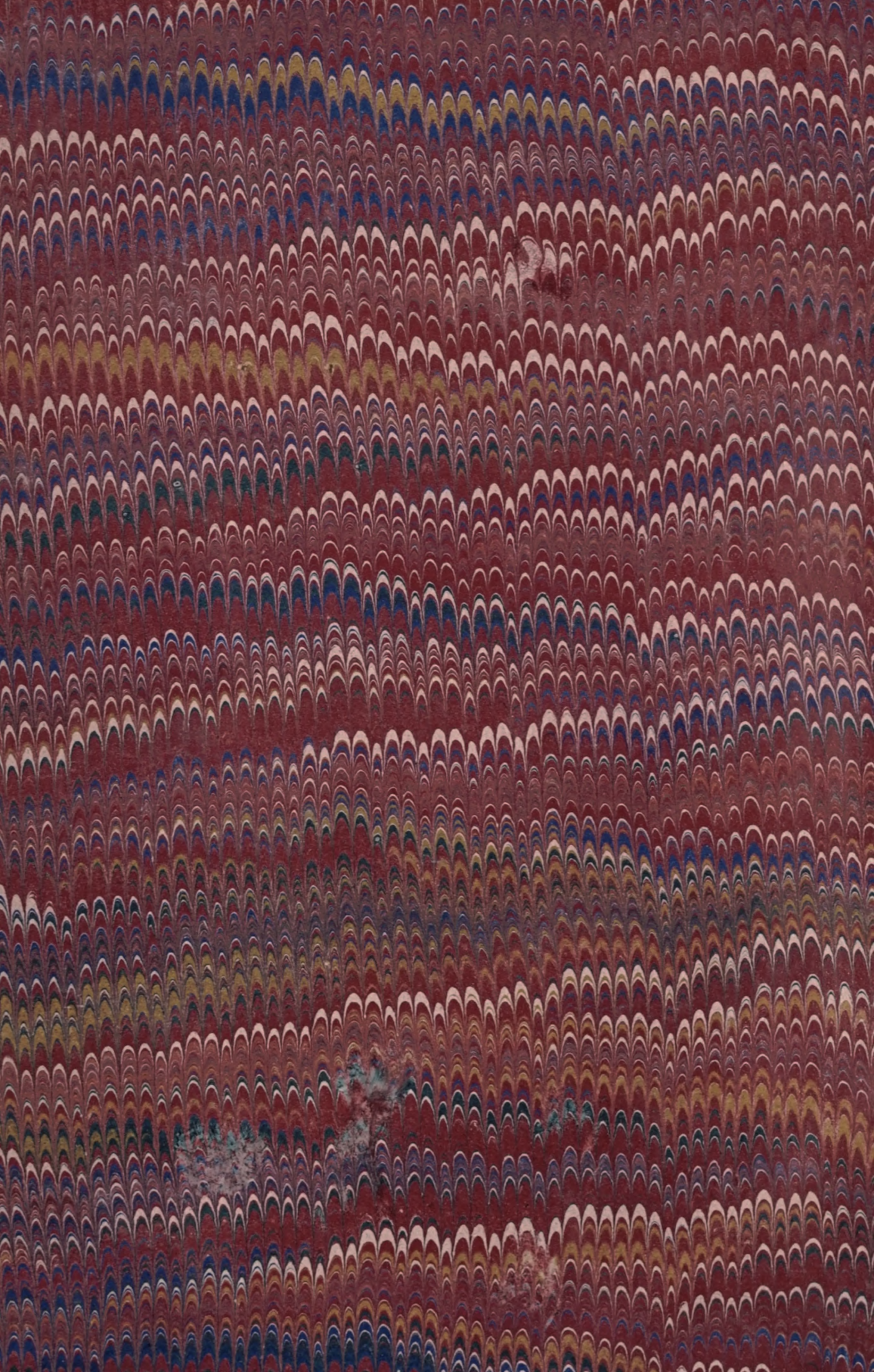
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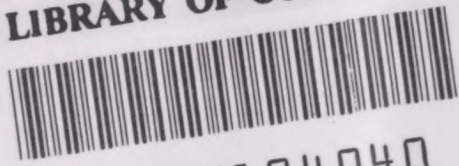


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